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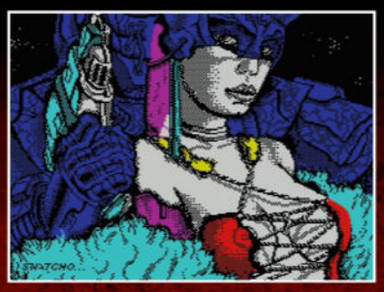

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CORE DESIGN BOSS JEREMY HEATH-SMITH ON LARA'S KEY QUESTS – AND BEYOND
PLUS: BEHIND THE SCENES OF TOMB RAIDER II WITH LEAD CODER GAVIN RUMMERY

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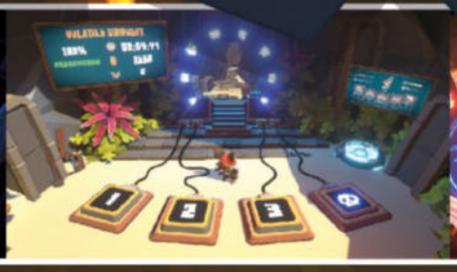

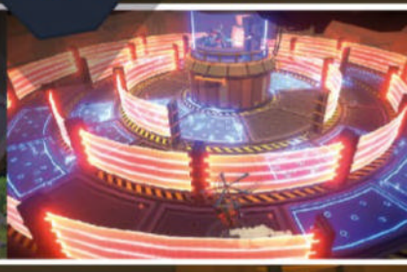

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE CORE DESIGN GAME?

DARRAN JONES

It has got to be *Tomb Raider* for me. I had a PC at the time and was blown away by it.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful daughters and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *Driver: San Francisco*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

The first *Tomb Raider*, especially that bit where you climb out of the sphinx and the camera zooms out. It almost gave me vertigo.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go
Currently playing: *Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2 was one of the first games I got for my PlayStation, and became a defining experience in my first year with the console. I revisited it recently and it still holds up pretty well.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Kero Kero King*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Has to be *Thunderhawk* on the Mega-CD, one of the best games on the platform according to *MEGA* magazine and us. It really felt like a 'next-gen' game back then.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *Kenshi*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now.

PAUL DRURY

Yes, I know it is stupidly unforgiving and relies heavily on trial and error, but I had many entertaining hours playing *Rick Dangerous* on the Commodore 64, even if much of them was spent being killed with no warning. Character-building stuff.
Expertise: Horse to ostrich weight ratios
Currently playing: *Gran Trak 10*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

ANDREW FISHER

Rick Dangerous 2 – it adds some clever ideas to the original design, and is challenging to get through.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: Force Bot
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

GRAEME MASON

Probably a bit of a left-field choice, but I absolutely adore *Thunderhawk* on the Mega-CD. It also has an amazing soundtrack by Martin Iversen.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Chuckie Egg*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

RORY MILNE

There's something very special about the original *Tomb Raider*. Modern games may make it look primitive, but it did it all first and it takes me right back to when gaming grew up.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Clockwork Knight*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

ADAM BARNES

I'm going to be a bit hipster about this one and say *Fighting Force*. It might not have been a perfect 3D transition for the beat-'em-up genre, but I'll be damned if I didn't have fun with it.
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Currently playing: *Terra Nil*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

LOADING...

Few videogame characters have had as meteoric a rise as Lara Croft. Appearing in 1996 when the gaming world was still grappling with both 3D worlds and the concept of a strong female protagonist, she was an immediate success and became one of those rare videogame characters to enjoy a life outside of the medium.

To highlight her deserved success we're focussing on not one, but two Lara-themed features this month. One highlights some of her early adventures at Core Design, as well as many other titles from the Derby-based developer with input from cofounder Jeremy Heath-Smith, while the other goes behind the scenes of *Tomb Raider II*, arguably one of the best *Tomb Raider* games Core ever made. Our thanks to lead programmer Gavin Rummery for offering such fascinating insight into Lara's second quest.

Elsewhere in this issue we highlight some of the more interesting peripherals that were created for Atari's 2600 console, go behind the scenes of *Joust 2*, *HeroQuest* and *Sentinel Returns* and revisit *Game Over* and *Zool*. We find out if Capcom's remake of *Resident Evil 4* has been worth the wait and reveal the history behind the cult PC series *Stronghold*. Oh, and don't forget to check out our great subs offer on page 28.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.

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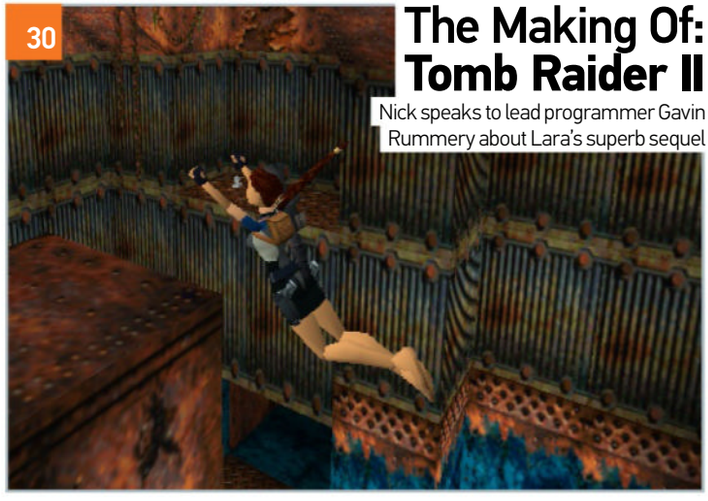
Nick's a master at digging up obscure add-ons and he's found yet another you probably haven't heard of

A Tribute To: Core Design
Jeremy Heath-Smith chats to Rory Milne about a number of Core titles, including several *Tomb Raider* games



The Making Of: Tomb Raider II
Nick speaks to lead programmer Gavin Rummery about Lara's superb sequel

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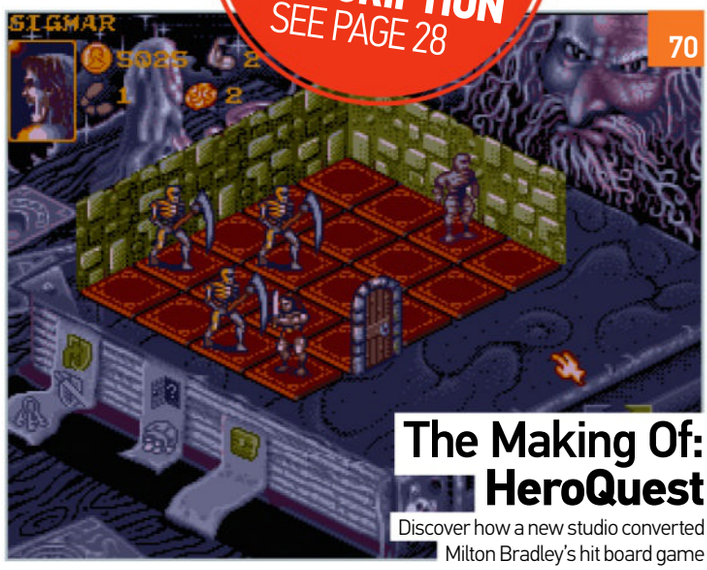

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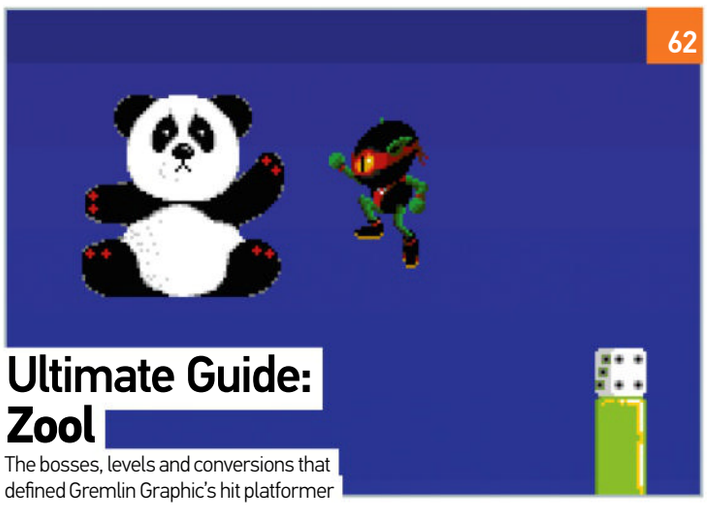

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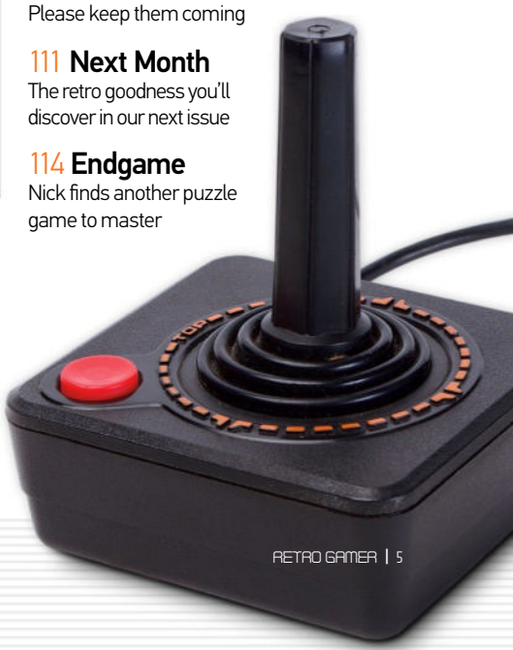
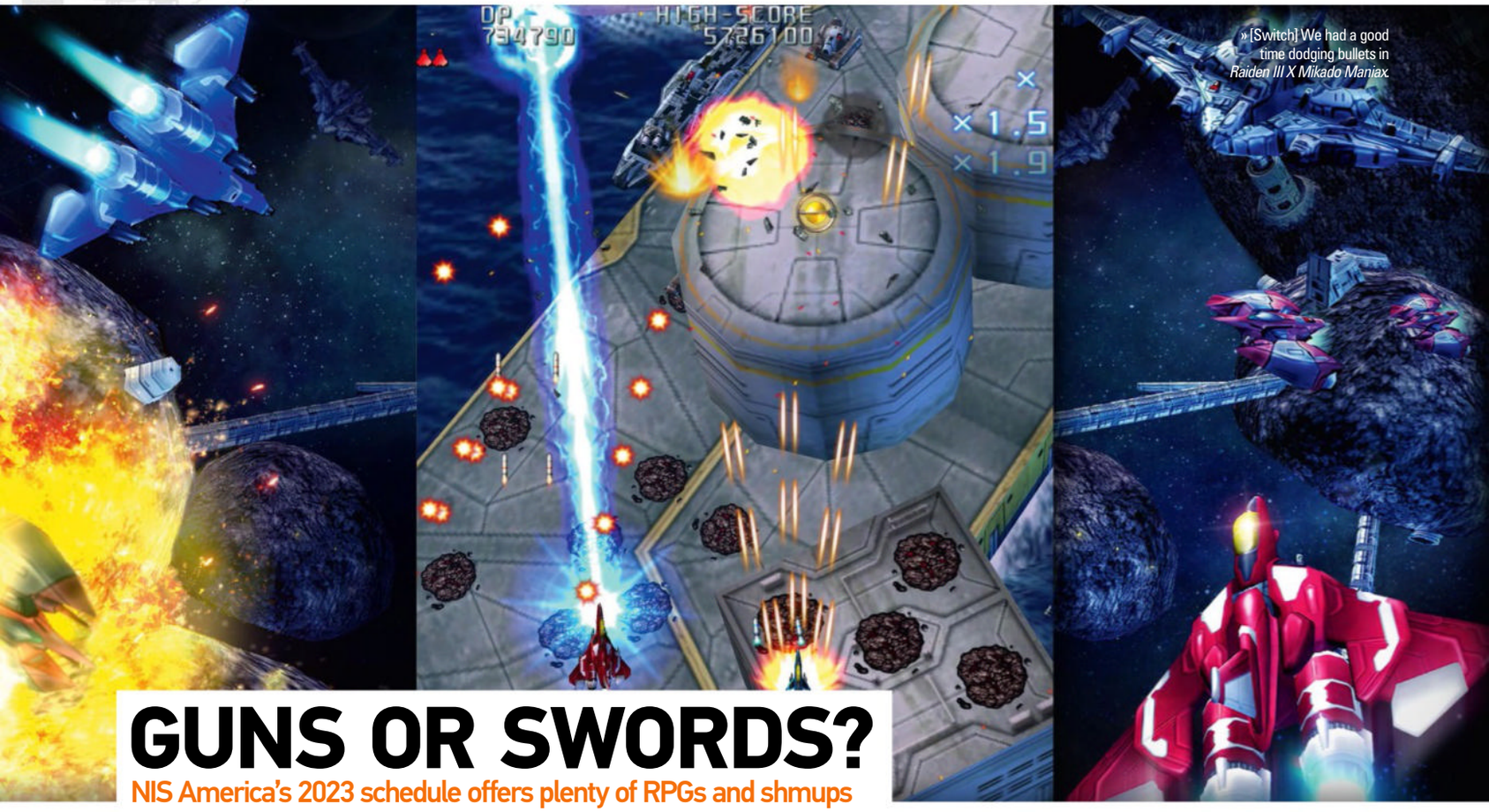
Ultimate Guide: Zool

The bosses, levels and conversions that defined Gremlin Graphic's hit platformer





» [Switch] We had a good time dodging bullets in *Raiden III X Mikado Maniax*.

GUNS OR SWORDS?

NIS America's 2023 schedule offers plenty of RPGs and shmups

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Nick visited NIS America and discovered lots of retro goodness

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Our resident columnist recalls the time he introduced his kids to the joys of Microsoft's Xbox One

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12 A MOMENT WITH
The creators of *Demon's Tilt* are back to tell us about their exciting new follow-up *XenoTilt*

14 BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES
More time-travelling excitement as Nick parks the DeLorean and lands in August 2006

NIS America is always a company we like to keep an eye on – not just for its RPGs, which are its traditional strength, but its continued support of classic franchises. The publisher has a wide range of retro-related games coming up for the remainder of 2023, with both re-releases of old favourites and sequels in classic franchises, so we recently took the opportunity to see them in action and get some hands-on time with some of them.

Of the games we saw, *GrimGrimoire OnceMore* should already be available for PS4, PS5 and Switch by the time you read this (our review is on page 96). This fantasy real-time strategy game is an updated remaster of the PS2 game *GrimGrimoire*, which was developed by Vanillaware and originally released in 2007. If you're familiar with the original or other Vanillaware games such as *Odin Sphere* and *Muramasa: The Demon Blade*, you'll be expecting beautiful 2D graphics and *GrimGrimoire OnceMore* doesn't disappoint – we've enjoyed reviewing it, and it felt as though it had been designed for high-definition displays from the start.

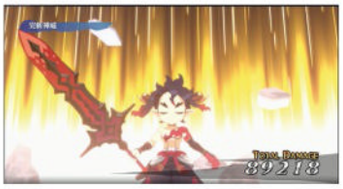
» [PS4] *GrimGrimoire OnceMore* should be out now, and you can see it has Vanillaware's trademark style.

Another revival from the mid-Noughties, *Raiden III X Mikado Maniax*, is headed to PS4, PS5, Xbox One, Xbox Series X/S, Switch and PC on 9 June. The original game was a well-regarded entry in the venerable shoot-'em-up series, and this version features Score Attack, Boss Rush and World Ranking modes alongside the regular game, as well as brand-new soundtrack arrangements and the choice to assign any song to any stage. We had the chance to play the Switch version of this game and we were able to perform some daring weaves through showers of enemy fire without difficulty, so we've got high hopes for the final product – not least because the PS2 version is so expensive these days.

If you prefer your shoot-'em-ups horizontal rather than vertical, *R-Type Final 3 Evolved* is headed to PS5 on 28 April and includes the stages from *R-Type Final 2* as well as new stages, giving you over 20 stages in which to blast those Bydo baddies. *R-Type Tactics I/II Cosmos* is also on the way for PS4, PS5, Switch and PC later in 2023, packaging together the turn-based strategy games that originally appeared on PSP – the latter of which was previously exclusive to Japan. *Ys IX: Monstrum Nox* will also be launching on PS5 on 12 May, having previously appeared on PS4 and Switch in 2021. This entry in the long-running action RPG series has more adventure elements than previous games, with a particular emphasis on movement and exploration.

There's plenty more RPG action on offer in the summer. *The Legend Of Heroes: Trails Into Reverie* is scheduled for release on 7 July for PS4, PS5, Switch and PC. Described as being like the *Avengers Assemble* of the *Trails* series, this RPG features over 50 playable characters and brings the Crossbell and Erebonia

» [PS5] We didn't get a chance to try *R-Type Final 3 Evolved*, but thankfully there's not long to wait.



» [Switch] Disgaea 7 is looking to right the wrongs of the underwhelming sixth game in the series.

arcs of the *Trails* series to a close. Fans of the series will also want to watch out for *The Legend Of Nayuta: Boundless Trails*, which is coming to PS4, Switch and PC later in 2023. This game was originally a Japan-only release for the PSP in 2012, and has combat closer to that of the *Ys* series than the usual *Trails* standard. Going back further in time, *Rhapsody: Marl Kingdom Chronicles* will present the PlayStation and PS2 RPGs *Rhapsody II: The Ballad Of The Little Princess* and *Rhapsody III: Memories Of Marl Kingdom* in English for the first time, and is set for release for PS5, Switch and PC this summer.

Disgaea 7: Vows Of The Virtuous takes the long-running strategy RPG series to the Japanese-inspired

» [PC] Both of the *Rhapsody* games in the collection have some truly lovely pixel art.

» [PS5] If you missed the previous releases, *Ys IX: Monstrum Nox* is back on Sony's latest system.

netherworld of Hinomoto, starring a lazy samurai named Fuji and the bushido enthusiast Pirilika. We were able to get an early look at a Japanese build of the game and see some of the new features, including Jumbification – battles between giant characters – and item reincarnation, as well as the return of favourite character classes alongside new ones. The team is aiming for a return to form after *Disgaea 6*, and so far the game looks to be avoiding the performance issues of that game. *Disgaea 7* is due out this autumn, for PS4, PS5, Switch and PC.

» [PS5] Newcomers should play previous games before *Trails Into Reverie*, or risk missing the plot.

Beyond the retro releases, we also got to try *Monster Menu: The Scavenger's Cookbook*, which is Nippon Ichi Software's first all-new strategy RPG title in many years. You play as a group of lost adventurers, who must scavenge ingredients from the environment and defeated enemies to feed themselves at they attempt to escape their predicament. While it shares some commonalities with the *Disgaea* series like joint attacks and a grid-based battlefield, this is for players that are more into dungeon crawling than elaborate plots – you build your own characters and choose their classes, and must manage factors like hunger and hydration to keep them ready for battle. *Monster Menu* is set for release on 26 May for PS4, PS5 and Switch.

You can expect to see more on these games in our review section as the year goes on.

PIKO RETURNS TO EVERCADE

The Piko Interactive collections for Evercade have been highly interesting, with some truly eclectic selections of games, and that's set to continue with *Piko Interactive Collection 3*. Highlights from the ten-game cartridge include the Mega Drive first-person shooter *Zero Tolerance*, PlayStation platformer *40 Winks* and a previously unreleased Game Boy Color version of Gaelco's *Radikal Bikers*.

MAJOR WII U FAULT FOUND

Although the Wii U isn't quite retro yet, the hardware still has plenty of retro appeal. Unfortunately, a recent spate of reports has highlighted that the console's NAND memory seems to be susceptible to corruption if the system isn't powered on for a long period of time, leaving the system inoperable. The modder Voultar has shown that many cases can be fixed using a Raspberry Pi Pico and a program called UDPIH, but it's a good reminder to regularly check your old hardware.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

The kids are alright

When my boys were very little, they didn't know about videogames. We as parents had made a decision that we weren't going to introduce them to gaming for a few years. I had an Xbox under the telly, but they just thought it was for watching Netflix or Prime. They had no idea what it was really for.

Eventually I decided we had been patient enough and they should learn about gaming. I'd been earning money from gaming podcasts (MSN Gamecast anyone?) and TV shows for a while, so I thought it only fair for them to see part of what daddy did for a job.

To teach them I took them to a gaming exhibition at the Science Museum. My youngest must have been four and his brother six. As soon as they walked into the hall, their minds were blown. Firstly, it was a pretty impressive line-up. A lot of old retro stuff – cabs, consoles, old computers like the BBC and C64 – there was also some newer things. We walked around and stopped at almost every machine. *Donkey Kong* seemed to really grab them. In fact whenever we go to a retro bar, that's the one they spend their time on.

Eventually we stopped at a row of Xboxes. Xbox's? Xbii? They looked at the machine, then the screen and then slowly turned their heads with a look of realisation. "Daddy", my eldest asked, "isn't this what we have at home?" "Yes son, it is," I replied, knowing life would never be the same again. "And ours can play games?" "It certainly can." "Can we play games on it when we get home?"

Oh boy. There are some real sweet moments during one's career as a parent, and this was a true highlight. We spent the rest of the afternoon in the museum playing all kinds of stuff. Apart from the aforementioned *Donkey Kong*, *Minecraft* and several racing games were huge hits with the boys. We get home and the boys rush up to their mum, "The black box under the television is a thing called an Xbox and you can play games on it." It has to be said, their mum was very understanding.

Six years later and things have really moved on. *Sonic Racing* and the *Cars* game are a distant memory. As are those flipping *Lego* games. I HATED them SO MUCH! The kids are pretty much stuck on *Fortnite* for the eldest and *Gorilla Tag* on VR for the 11 year old. I've said before how important online gaming was during lockdown. It was a great way for them to remain in contact with their friends when the world was disintegrating around them.

They've also started emulating their dad but in a very 2023 way. They have their own (carefully monitored by me) YouTube channels. They record and edit their own videos and my heart swells with pride every time they upload something. If you want to smash that like button (I know all the lingo now) head over to Alex Plays *Fortnite* or Kimbo Collaboration. Oh, they're even making money from their Epic Creator Code! APF if you're asking.

It's not just my kids. There are thousands out there streaming or making some really creative videos. If you stumble across one, leave a nice comment. I promise you it will really make their day. *

> "There are some real sweet moments during one's career as a parent, and this was a true highlight"

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

A real connection

I had the good fortune recently to interview Sir Ian Livingstone CBE for my YouTube channel, and in doing a bit of research for it, I was reminded that he wrote the story for the game *Eureka!* You may recall, if you're of a certain vintage, that *Eureka!* offered a £25,000 prize to the first person who completed it.

It was won by the one and only Matthew Woodley, who was later employed by Domark, and enjoyed a long career working on games, both in a creative capacity and in marketing – from *Championship Manager 2* to various Sega titles such as *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg* during the Noughties.

Eureka! was primarily a time-travelling text adventure, with RPG-style hit points, and arcade-like sections that most of us who played it hated. But… just as with Ian's *Fighting Fantasy* books – the reason he was asked to provide the story for *Eureka!* – the adventure sections managed to be evocative without being overly wordy.

Though *Eureka!* may not be remembered quite in the same league as the likes of *The Hobbit*, there was something about text adventures that could transport me like no other genre of game. I graduated onto point-and-clicks – anything Sierra did was an insta-purchase for me – but words (even when later accompanied by simple graphics) sparked my imagination like nothing else.

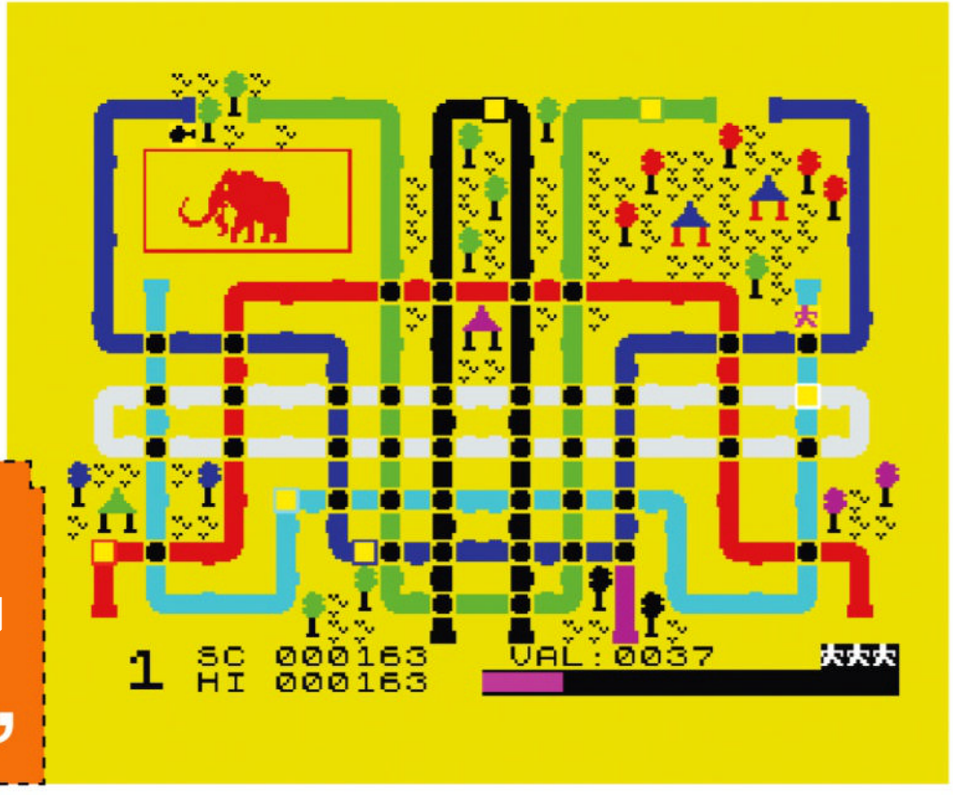
I'm pretty sure the first I ever played was Actic Computing's *Adventure C: Ship Of Doom*. Having just given it a play for the first time in years, I'm shocked at how basic it was. It literally starts with, "You are in your spaceship. An exit is south. I can also see: an escape button. Tell me what to do." *To Kill A Mockingbird* it is not, so how come I can almost picture the corridors of the alien space cruiser I was stranded upon? In the absence of information, the brain clearly does a lot of the work to fill in the blanks.

"You are in a comfortable tunnel-like hall," is an opening many of us will recall – iconic in its own way, as we sat reading and re-reading the words while the accompanying image loaded in line by line.

For me though, the best opening text of any adventure game is, "Scarthorpe is the sort of town where even the dogs carry flick knives, where there's only one road in, and it's a one-way street." That was the opening line to *Urban Upstart*. Again, it might not be a classic, but it says it all that I can still quote those words.

I don't know what it was with text games that allowed me to connect with them in ways that more action-oriented titles often didn't. Maybe it was the slower pace; the chance to really let the text sink in, and be absorbed. They were games for the brain, rather than reflexes. Or maybe it was because I've got quite a visual imagination, so they just worked well with the way I'm wired.

Whatever the case, those sparse, scrolling, descriptions were like a magic-eye picture. Something that on first glance seemed quite simple, but the more I focussed, the more the real world would fade away as I became part of something vivid, and hyperreal. *



> "There was something about text adventures that could transport me like no other genre of game"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:
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HOPE AND HOMES FOR CHILDREN

URGENT APPEAL

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine is not just a humanitarian crisis for the Ukrainian people; it's a child protection emergency.

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Please quote **FP22 - CL** when making your donation.

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Start date ☐☐☐☐ Expiry date ☐☐☐☐ Issue no. ☐☐ (Maestro only) Security no. ☐☐☐ (on signature strip)

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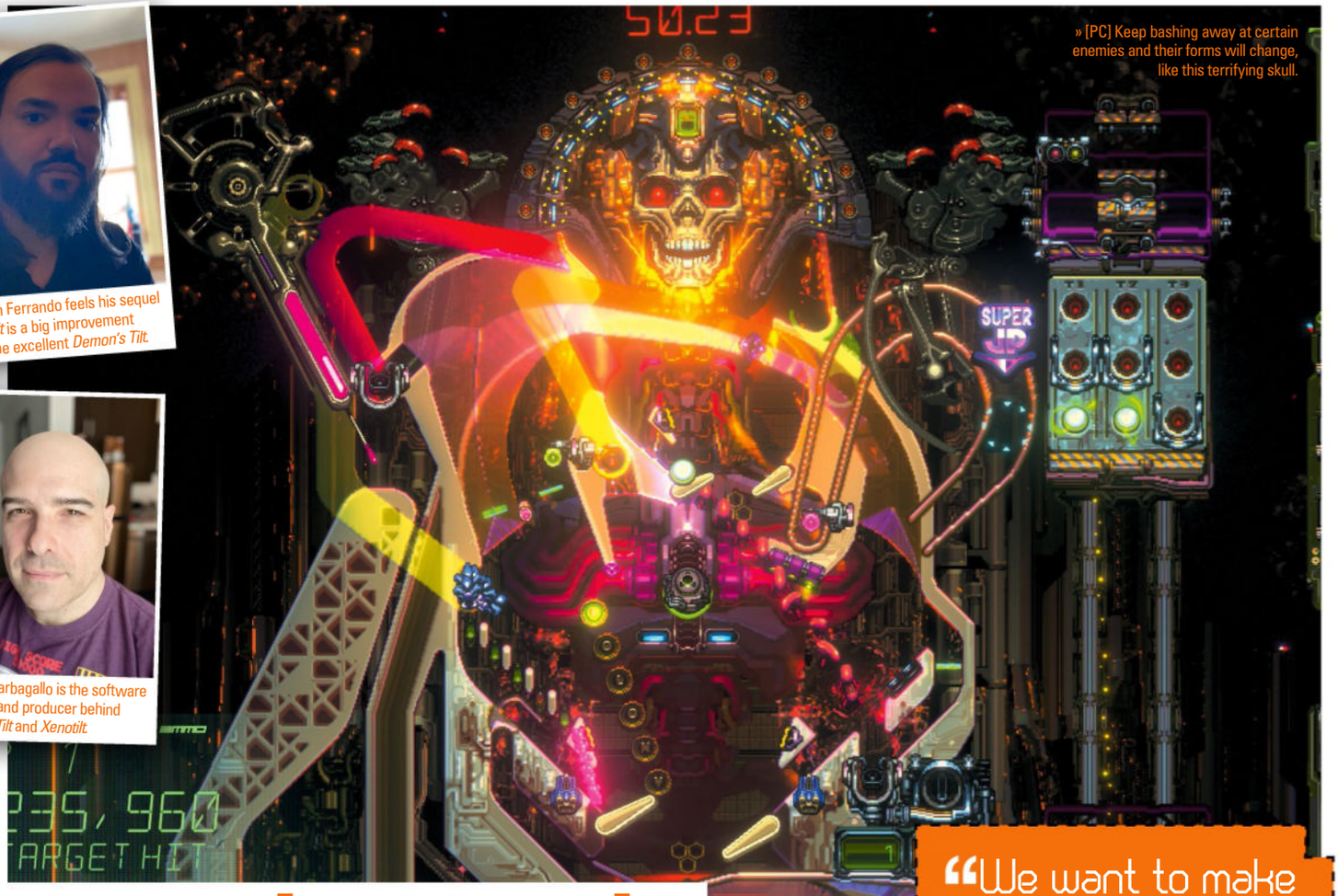
» Adam Ferrando feels his sequel *Xenotilt* is a big improvement over the excellent *Demon's Tilt*.

» Ralph Barbagallo is the software engineer and producer behind *Demon's Tilt* and *Xenotilt*.



» [PC] Keep bashing away at certain enemies and their forms will change, like this terrifying skull.

Xenotilt: Hostile Pinball Action

Ralph Barbagallo and Adam Ferrando on creating a sequel to Demon's Tilt, their first pinball hit

***Demon's Tilt* wowed gamers with its mix of shooting and frenetic pinball action and now its developers are back with its sequel.** Software engineer and producer Ralph Barbagallo and game designer, artist and animator Adam Ferrando tell us how *Xenotilt: Hostile Pinball Action* came to be.

Were you surprised by the reception of *Demon's Tilt*?

Ralph: When I first saw Adam's prototype, I loved it – but know my own tastes are kind of esoteric. At the time I figured there were maybe 10-15,000 people across all platforms that shared my enthusiasm for video pinball. I can say that our sales blew past my expectations. It was surprising, but not entirely since I try to base business models around the most pessimistic possible projections.

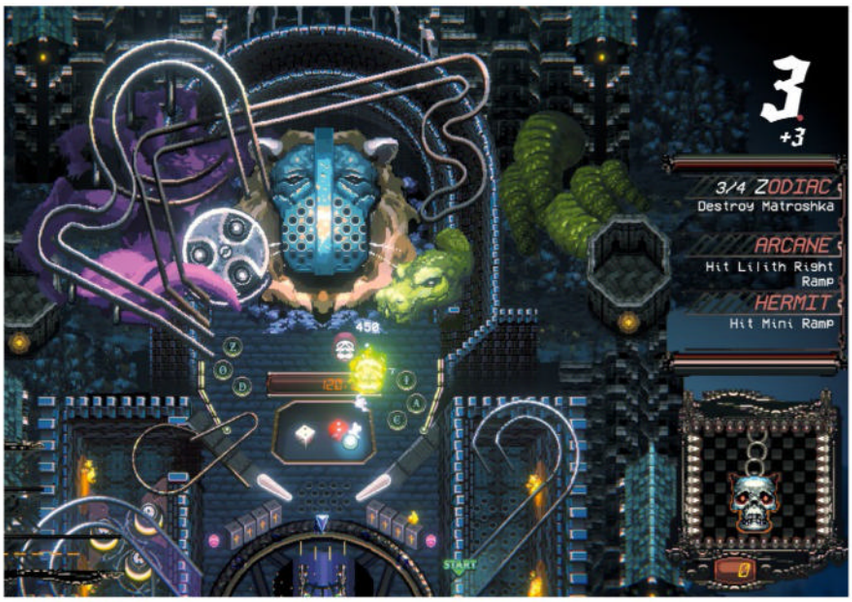
Why add the Turrets to *Xenotilt* and how do they work?

Adam: The sci-fi setting for a sequel was a no-brainer, and turrets/big guns chewing up aliens/bugs is classic imagery. The Turret metaphor makes sense for the player, they live apart from the player, they are set and forget, they auto target. So in *Xenotilt* you collect ammo. When you want to fire Turrets you cradle the ball and nudge down and the Turrets fire on all available baddies clearing the way for your ball. Cradling is good pinball play, so the Turret/cradle mechanic is promoting a natural and good play style. The Turrets improve flow, help you reset, or give you a sensation of rallying/momentum.

> "We want to make sure you can enjoy this game on the same hardware you played the original on"
>
> **RALPH BARBAGALLO**

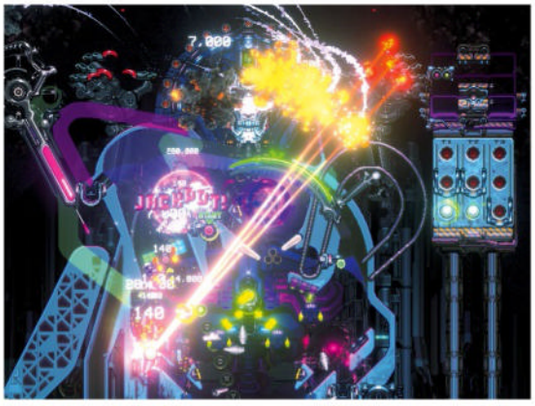
Can you tell us what other improvements *Xenotilt* offers over its predecessor?

Adam: Everything has improved. The physics are smoother, the flipper action is better, every mechanic was re-evaluated for *Xenotilt* from spinners, to slings, to either improve it or add a novel twist. For example, there is a Nine-Ball Multiball Matrix that sits in an elevator shaft running along the playfield. You can lock up balls three at a time for three Three-Ball Multiballs or load it up for Wizard Mode. Each slot you lock a ball into activates a unique Perk. That powers you up as the board grows more intense.



» *Demon's Tilt* also remains popular with Adam telling us, "Steam Deck has given *Demon's Tilt* a second life."

» [PC] As you'd expect, the view pans out when Multiball is activated.



» [PC] The Multiball Matrix is on the far right. Each ball gives you a Perk, while stacking three on top of each other activates Multiball.

» Adam tells us, "The art is upgraded, there's a new 2D lighting system where sprites can be lit by real-time lights."

» [PC] Turrets let you shoot enemies and bullets. Adam mentioned a similar system for *Demon's Tilt* but dropped it as, "It just didn't work."

Tell us about *Xenotilt*'s Perks.
Adam: Each slot unlocks up to nine Perks, with level three Perks being the most powerful. For example, Airlock will suck baddies into it, and during Multiball it sucks up all the balls and dumps them at a higher tier, extending Multiball. Piercing Shot allows your ball to pass through enemy bullets, with this up nothing can impede your flow except bosses.

What challenges have you faced on *Xenotilt* from a technical point of view?
Ralph: Even though *Xenotilt* is a 2D game, there's lots of stuff we can do with advanced effects that can cause large amounts of overdraw, choking out older GPUs. There's a temptation to go crazy with new features to take advantage of new hardware, but we've tried to make sure all the new VFX have alternatives that work on older consoles such as the Switch or notebooks with integrated GPUs. We want to make sure you can still enjoy this game on the same hardware you played the original on.

And what are the challenges you have tackled from a gameplay perspective?
Adam: Legibility. While the game follows a maximalist philosophy, it still has to be read. We can overwhelm the player but there's a point where it's just unfair, as it's obfuscating gameplay. There's an option to nearly every effect to tone it down or disable it. New for *Xenotilt* the player can dim the playfield with a slider, so the ball and flippers are more prevalent.

How important are online leaderboards to you?
Ralph: Historically pinball is a highly competitive game, so naturally that carries over to the digital form. The competition for score in *Demon's Tilt* is particularly intense – I think that most of our bug reports revolve around leaderboard and achievement features since they are under so much scrutiny. Because of this, whenever we think about changing anything in a patch or title update, we really have to consider the impact it may have on scoring.

Will there be any hidden tables to discover?
Adam: *Xenotilt* will have something added post Early Access called EX-Mode just like *Demon's Tilt* did. In EX-Mode we are planning a new meta-progression system called EX Survivors. You will be able to rescue crewmates then hire them, they will provide a buff as long as they are hired. It's like you are assembling a team of specialists to pull off a big score. I think players are going to love this.

Why do you think pinball games remain so popular?
Ralph: Humans have an innate fascination with gravity and how it interacts with the world. Pinball is the perfect manifestation of this as a game.

I've seen younger players who are completely unfamiliar with pinball try *Xenotilt* and become instantly hooked once they understand the basic idea. It's just wired into our lizard brain.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

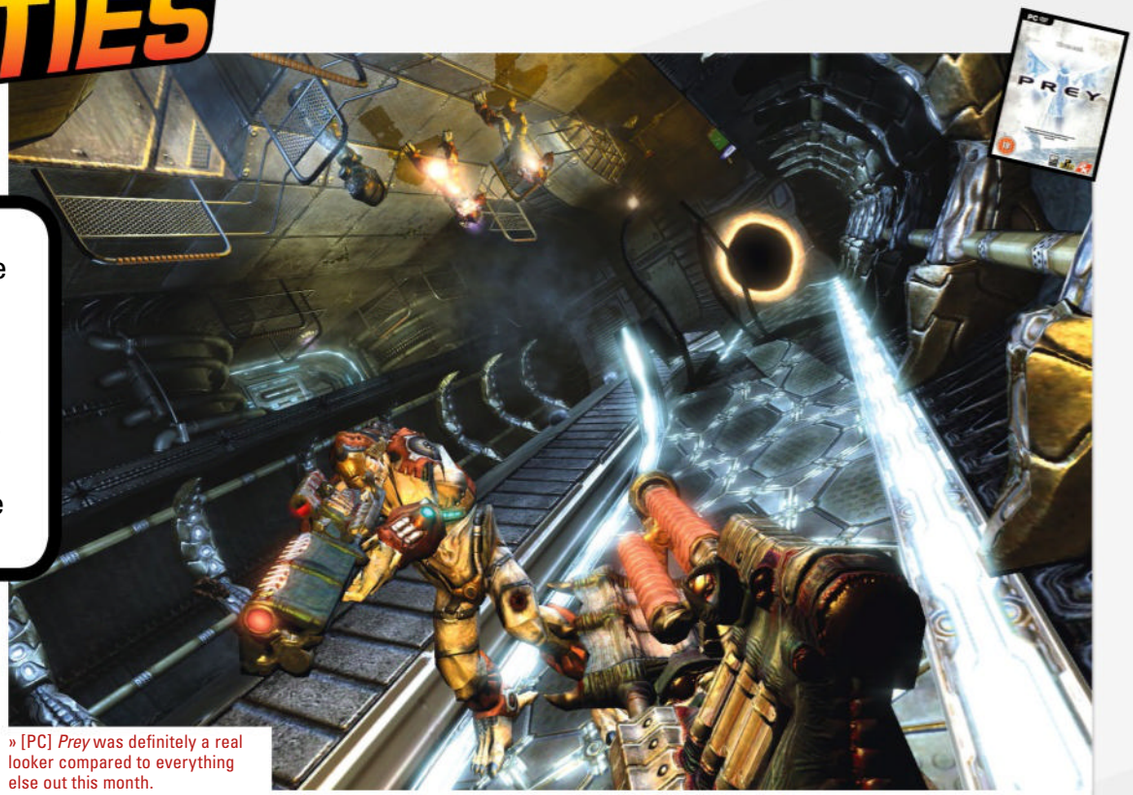
AUGUST 2006 – You don't mess with tradition, so once again we follow an exciting E3 show with the annual summer software drought. Nick Thorpe fires up the time machine, dutifully covering the slow months as well as the exciting ones

NEWS AUGUST 2006

Twenty-four people were arrested in London, Birmingham and High Wycombe on 9 August, in connection with a terrorist plot to detonate liquid explosives on transatlantic flights. The plotters planned to cause explosions with acetone peroxide bombs disguised as soft drinks. Nine men were ultimately tried over the plot, with seven convicted and two acquitted of all charges. This case resulted in restrictions on liquids that can be taken aboard planes.

On 23 August, 18-year-old Natascha Kampusch escaped from the house of her kidnapper after over eight years in captivity. The Austrian citizen was abducted on her way to school in 1998 and was held in a small, windowless soundproof cell in her captor's house, but eventually escaped while her kidnapper was distracted by a phone call while she was hoovering his van.

The Scream, a famous painting by Edvard Munch, was recovered on 31 August after having been stolen in August 2004. Although damaged, police remarked that it was in better condition than had been expected, and it was put on exhibition for five days the following month before repair work commenced.



» [PC] *Prey* was definitely a real looker compared to everything else out this month.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 2006

This month saw the arrival of *Prey*, a first-person shooter for Xbox 360 and PC that blends sci-fi and spiritual themes. The game had been in development since 1995, but you wouldn't have known, with *PC Gamer*'s 82% review praising it as an "astonishing-looking" game that "is often great fun, occasionally very creepy and frequently highly impressive". In *games™* it earned 8/10 for being "a masterpiece of design", whereas *X-360* felt that "online multiplayer more than makes up for the single-player's shortcomings", but that for those without Xbox Live it was "a very short and linear adventure that you'll probably only play through once", awarding it 6/10.

Beyond that, Microsoft's consoles had little to offer, with a dearth of exciting software for either the Xbox 360 or its older sibling. The only game to crack 8/10 in *Xbox 360: The Official Magazine* was a port of *The Lord Of The Rings: Battle For Middle Earth II*. The reviewer complained that "EA has chosen to restrict what should be epic confrontations to smaller skirmishes", but praised it as, "The first working console strategy game." *X-360* and *games™* both gave it 7/10, with the latter pointing out that the PC version was "£20 cheaper and much easier to play". The top-scoring game in *Official Xbox Magazine* was the film tie-in platformer *Over The Hedge*, which offered gameplay that was "far from being rewarding" but also "not quite bad enough to be dismissed as a 'cash-in'", and earned a 6.8/10 score due to it.

The best-scoring game of the month on the PS2 was *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories*, a port of the PSP game. *Play* gave it 90%, claiming that "it may well be clearly inferior to the last *GTA* game released on the system,

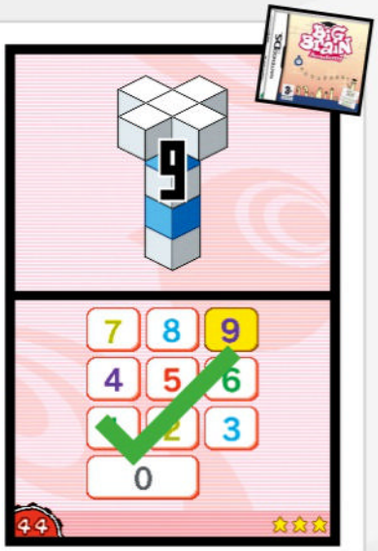
» [Xbox 360] Microsoft's console has USB ports, surely mouse support wouldn't have been a huge stretch?

but *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* is still a very good game". *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* felt that "you still can't beat a dose of *GTA*", but that the game showed "a lack of ambition", and gave it 8/10. Bubbling under, horror sequel *Forbidden Siren 2* earned 7/10 from *Edge* and the same from *games™*, as well as 70% from *Play* which described it as being "far too dull, far too disjointed and far too clumsy to be recommended above the leading lights" of the genre. The GameCube was still limping along too, with *Super Monkey Ball Adventure* earning 68% in *NGamer* and 70% in *Official Nintendo Magazine*, with the latter saying that the main single-player adventure was "average".

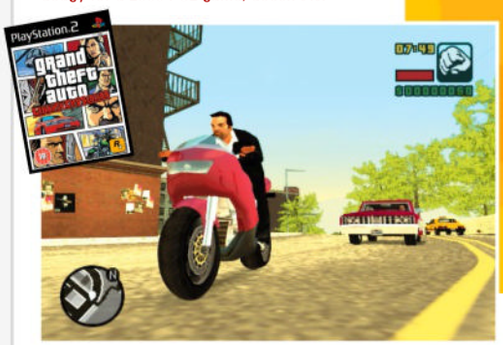
Fortunately, the handhelds managed to come through with the goods. On the PSP, the delightful *LocoRoco* gave players a platform game in which little creatures could be rolled around by tilting the stage with the shoulder buttons. *Play* awarded it 94% and described it as "an impossibly happy game", while *games™* declared it to be "the best thing on PSP by some way" in a 9/10 review. *Edge* wasn't quite as taken with it, giving it 7/10 and noting that the lack of direct control over your characters makes for "fiddly frustration" in traditional platforming sections. Ubisoft's turn-based strategy *Field Commander* earned 81% from *Go Play* and 8/10 from *Official PS2*, with the latter noting that it was "low on gloss but high on stat-crunching simulation". PS2 port *Def Jam Fight For NY: The Takeover* also scored 81% in *Go Play* and 8/10 in *Official PS2*.

On the DS, *Big Brain Academy* got 80% from both *NGamer* and *ONM*, with the former declaring it to be, "A great, less-serious complement to *Brain Training*, far and away the more accessible of the two." The updated pet simulator *Nintendogs: Dalmatian & Friends* scored 92% in *ONM*, but *NGamer* awarded it 80%, noting that "they've taken the most popular breeds from the other games", and that the core game was "entirely unchanged" from previous versions. *Age Of Empires: The Age Of Kings* scored 85% in *ONM*, with the magazine feeling that the turn-based strategy was "a cleverly trimmed-down version" which "borrows familiar combat mechanics from successful franchises like *Advance Wars*, *Fire Emblem* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*". The setpiece battles were praised, but the magazine felt that the AI opponents in the open-ended games "just aren't smart enough".

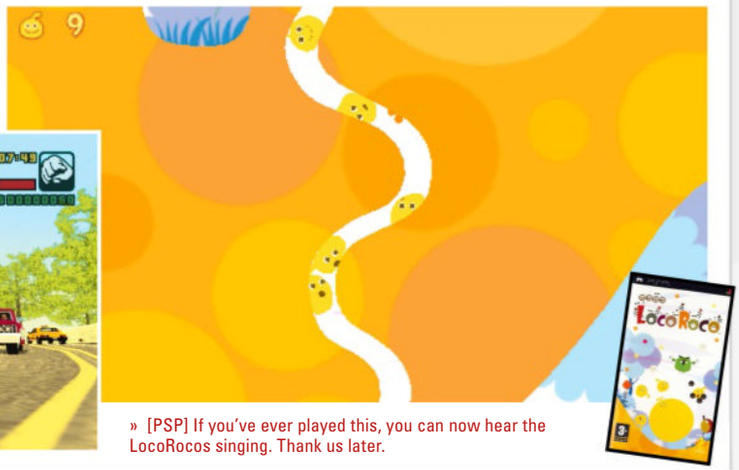
Join us again next time, when hopefully something a bit more exciting will be making its way to existing consoles before the Wii and PlayStation 3 arrive. ✱



» [DS] Professor Steiner's tutelage gives us a 141 and 2/3 chance of solving this.



» [PS2] Let's be honest, this looks a bit dodgy for a 2006 PS2 game, doesn't it?



» [PSP] If you've ever played this, you can now hear the LocoRocos singing. Thank us later.

CHARTS

AUGUST 2006

PLAYSTATION 2

1 – 2006 FIFA World Cup (EA)
2 – Hitman: Blood Money (Eidos)
3 – Sensible Soccer 2006 (Codemasters)
4 – Tomb Raider: Legend (Eidos)
5 – Tourist Trophy (Sony)

PSP

1 – Tomb Raider: Legend (Eidos)
2 – 2006 FIFA World Cup (EA)
3 – Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (Konami)
4 – Daxter (Sony)
5 – Lemmings (Sony)

DS

1 – Animal Crossing: Wild World (Nintendo)
2 – Pokémon Link (Nintendo)
3 – Metroid Prime: Hunters (Nintendo)
4 – Tetris DS (Nintendo)
5 – Nintendogs: Labrador & Friends (Nintendo)

MUSIC

1 – Hips Don't Lie (Shakira ft Wyclef Jean)
2 – Every Time We Touch (Cascada)
3 – Ain't No Other Man (Christina Aguilera)
4 – Unfaithful (Rihanna)
5 – You Give Me Something (James Morrison)

THIS MONTH IN...

NGamer

Future's new Nintendo magazine is here, and it means business. "We've banned arty, minimalist pages, and forced the planet's best writers into contracts from which there is *no escape*." Cor, that's a bit much, especially for a Nintendo magazine.

Official Xbox Magazine

"Nobody is concerned any more about backwards compatibility," says Microsoft's Peter Moore. The mag asks, "Would you rather Microsoft produced more stellar next-gen games, or waste time porting *Minority Report*?"

Official PlayStation 2 Magazine

"Sony says it interferes with the motion-sensing tech, but Immersion, the company that pioneered 'rumble' reckons that's not so," says a report on the Sixaxis, before highlighting the lawsuit between the two.

RETRO GAMES TOO EXPENSIVE?

EVERCADE

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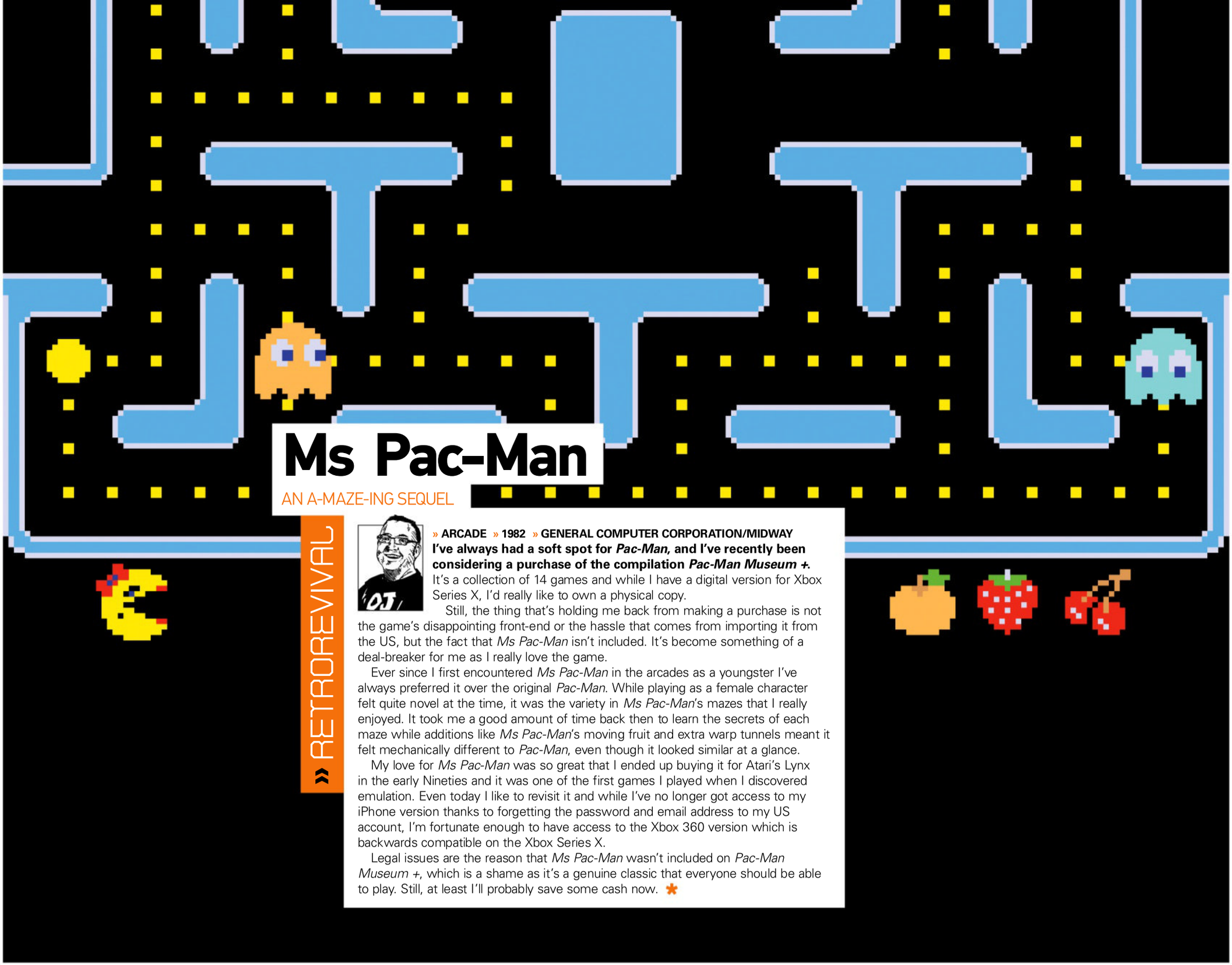
HIGH SCORE
6610
6610



Ms Pac-Man

AN A-MAZE-ING SEQUEL

» RETROREVIVAL

» ARCADE » 1982 » GENERAL COMPUTER CORPORATION/MIDWAY

I've always had a soft spot for *Pac-Man,* and I've recently been considering a purchase of the compilation *Pac-Man Museum +.* It's a collection of 14 games and while I have a digital version for Xbox Series X, I'd really like to own a physical copy.

Still, the thing that's holding me back from making a purchase is not the game's disappointing front-end or the hassle that comes from importing it from the US, but the fact that *Ms Pac-Man* isn't included. It's become something of a deal-breaker for me as I really love the game.

Ever since I first encountered *Ms Pac-Man* in the arcades as a youngster I've always preferred it over the original *Pac-Man*. While playing as a female character felt quite novel at the time, it was the variety in *Ms Pac-Man*'s mazes that I really enjoyed. It took me a good amount of time back then to learn the secrets of each maze while additions like *Ms Pac-Man*'s moving fruit and extra warp tunnels meant it felt mechanically different to *Pac-Man*, even though it looked similar at a glance.

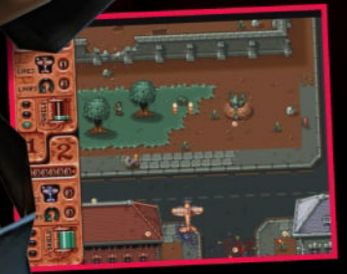
My love for *Ms Pac-Man* was so great that I ended up buying it for Atari's Lynx in the early Nineties and it was one of the first games I played when I discovered emulation. Even today I like to revisit it and while I've no longer got access to my iPhone version thanks to forgetting the password and email address to my US account, I'm fortunate enough to have access to the Xbox 360 version which is backwards compatible on the Xbox Series X.

Legal issues are the reason that *Ms Pac-Man* wasn't included on *Pac-Man Museum +*, which is a shame as it's a genuine classic that everyone should be able to play. Still, at least I'll probably save some cash now.

A TRIBUTE TO CORE DESIGN

JEREMY HEATH-SMITH

» Before cofounding Core Design, Jeremy Heath-Smith spent eight years in the games industry, working in sales and as a buyer for firms including Activision and Leisure Soft.



CREATED BY FORMER GREMLIN GRAPHICS' DERBY STAFF, CORE DESIGN FOUND SUCCESS WITH RICK DANGEROUS AND CHUCK ROCK BEFORE CAPTURING THE ZEITGEIST WITH LARA CROFT. RETRO GAMER CELEBRATES THE WORLD-BEATING STUDIO WITH COFOUNDER JEREMY HEATH-SMITH

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

Over the course of almost three decades, Core Design was defined by three factors above all others: the passion of those that worked in its mansion-like offices, its relationship with Sega and the originality of its output. The latter was in no small part down to the firm continuing the *anything goes* ethos of Gremlin Graphics' Derby staff – a number of whom had founded Core in 1988.

Core's launch title, *Rick Dangerous*, embraced this approach, and was duly lauded for its quirky, inventive platforming. Core's second title was a conversion of the obscure Sega coin-op *Dynamite Düx*, which in addition to reviewing well marked the beginning of an important relationship for the Derby-based developer.

Early Nineties highlights from Core included the humorous Stone-Age platformer *Chuck Rock*. The first of a successful trilogy, *Chuck Rock* was also one of Core's earliest Mega Drive releases, following on from the firm becoming one of only five companies in Europe to gain a publisher licence from Sega.

Core's arcade racer *Jaguar XJ220* and its polygon helicopter sim *Thunderhawk* followed as the Nineties rolled on, both gracing Sega's Mega-CD after first appearing on the Amiga. Its chart-topping 1994 shoot-'em-up *Soulstar* was a Mega-CD exclusive.

By this point, Core had been bought by the CentreGold group, which itself was sold to Eidos in 1996 – a year that turned out to be pivotal for Core. The studio had been developing for the Sega Saturn since late-1995, and in the new year it started releasing conversions of its Saturn output for the PlayStation. Core's first few 32-bit titles went down well, its combat chopper sequel *Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2* proving to be the most popular, and in the autumn it released the 3D adventure *Tomb Raider* for the Saturn.

Although highly praised, it wasn't until a PlayStation version came out a few weeks later that Core's game became a phenomenon. *Tomb Raider*'s iconic heroine – Lara Croft – quickly became one of the era's *it girls*, and she helped shift millions of copies of *Tomb Raider* in the process. Sequels followed, of course, and there was no sign of her popularity fading. So much so that Core released new instalments annually as it saw out the Nineties.

In the years 2000 to 2003, Core released four *Tomb Raider* titles for various systems – culminating in *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, which sold well after spending years in development hell. Core also delivered the novel *Project Eden* during this time, and the highly imaginative *Herdy Gerdy*.

Although sales of these latter titles paled in comparison to those of *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, their originality was easy to see. But in the spring of 2006, Core's staff and assets were sold to Rebellion Developments – with Eidos retaining the name Core Design and its IP.

What will always remain, however, is Core Design's incredible near-30-year body of work, an argument – if ever one was needed – that allowing creative developers a free hand pays dividends. And of course, we'll always have Lara. ✱

Special thanks to Ash Kaprielov for their additional help.

RICK DANGEROUS

VARIOUS, 1989

Infuriating and rewarding by turn, *Rick Dangerous* differentiates itself from most other platformers of the time by incorporating hidden dangers that players aren't given prior warning of. The effect of this is to make the game more of a memory test than a test of timing and reflexes. But its *Indiana Jones* stylings and the pleasure you get from working out how to outmanoeuvre its fiendish traps keeps you coming back for more.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"We were doing a conversion of *Dynamite Düx* for Sega, so we wanted to do an original game too, and Simon Phipps came up with *Rick Dangerous*. The guys who founded the business had been raised on platformers, so we all just loved it."

SWITCHBLADE

VARIOUS, 1989

The manga-inspired *Switchblade* is a tricky platformer with impressive combat mechanics. But rather than relying on timing challenges or difficult to reach platforms, the challenge to *Switchblade*'s platforming comes from the fact that unexplored areas are hidden. So until you find them you don't know they're there. The game's equally well-worked combat lets you perform different attacks based on how long you press the fire button, and there are collectable ranged weapons too.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"If you look back at that period of time, manga was a huge influence on so many people who were in that *world*, if you like. So it wasn't mainstream entertainment, it was classed as geeky – just like videogames were back then."

MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS

VARIOUS, 1990

Considering the source material, it's amazing Core managed to make any sort of game based on *Monty Python's Flying Circus* – let alone one with compelling gameplay. The end result is an interactive Terry Gilliam animation that primarily plays like a shoot-'em-up. You take charge of the *Python* character Gumby, who suffers all manner of strange body deformations in the core gameplay, before getting reconstructed when a sketch-based minigame is triggered.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"Whether it was a great game or not I think is arguable, but we definitely captured the essence of *Monty Python*. It really had that look and feel of Terry Gilliam's animations. It was all about getting sucked through pipes, and all sorts of other crazy shit. Virgin was the publisher, and it absolutely loved it, so who were we to argue?"

RICK DANGEROUS 2

VARIOUS, 1990

Demonstrating what an everyman its Rick Dangerous character is, Core chose to strip him of his *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* look and dress him up like Flash Gordon. This simple switch gives the sequel scope to incorporate any number of Thirties sci-fi standards in its level designs – including ray guns, robots that look like people in robot suits, ice planets and mad scientists. Core wisely opted to leave the gameplay of the original largely intact, however the hazards in the follow-up are flagged-up in advance, so there's more skill and less guesswork required this time around.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"We wanted to create a series. So you had an *Indiana Jones*-style game, then you had a *Flash Gordon*-style game. You could argue there were other things we could have done with it had there been different scenarios, but that was the idea."

CHUCK ROCK

VARIOUS, 1991

If *The Flintstones* had been created in Derby then it would have looked like *Chuck Rock*. As you might have guessed, the player character Chuck Rock chucks rocks, and by doing so he can dispatch prehistoric opponents. But he can also hold rocks above his head to give him protection from aerial foes and projectiles, or jump off them onto high-up ledges. Half the fun is experimenting to see what you can do with the rocks, and how they might help you survive Chuck's Stone-Age world.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"It was great that you had this item that you could use as a weapon, a step or a blocking tool. Chris Long was the game's creator. I think he was modelling Chuck Rock on me, with the big belly, wandering around looking vague!"

THUNDERHAWK

VARIOUS, 1991

Core's combat helicopter sim is split into six campaigns located in different hotspots around the globe, with each having multiple missions that have to be tackled one by one in order to achieve an overall objective. Adding to the experience is the fact that there's an ongoing narrative to give meaning to why you're taking your chopper into harm's way time after time. This takes the form of briefings from your commanding officer, who's also on-hand after each sortie to congratulate you on a job well done or reprimand you for screwing up. As well as delivering a variety of compelling operations, *Thunderhawk* deserves praise for running so quickly and smoothly on the 16-bit micros.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"*Thunderhawk* was a real change in direction for Core, because it was our first proper 3D game. Sarah Avory joined us with the technology for that, and it just blew us away. We wanted it to be like a console game, which was why we had auto-targeting, so you could blast away. It was bloody good, and we sold a lot of that game."

WOLFCHILD

VARIOUS, 1992

It isn't *Wolfchild*'s futuristic level designs that set it apart from other platform games. What makes it unique is that its challenge veers from near-impossible to manageable depending on if its hero is in human or wolf form, and if he's in the latter how powerful a weapon he's packing. In that respect, *Wolfchild* has a difficulty curve more like a power-up-based shoot-'em-up than a platformer, where the emphasis is on avoiding hits that will transform your character back to a human with only his fists to defend himself with.

ULTIMATE UPGRADES

The combat platformer's coolest power-ups

ARC BLAST

Although these only take out one enemy per shot, their downward curved trajectories are handy for taking out opponents that are standing directly beneath you and sending ammo in your direction.

HOMER

As their name suggests, Homers relentlessly seek out and destroy the nearest foe regardless of where they are on the screen. They're great for boss fights as you can use them from a safe space.

THREE WAY

What could be better than three projectiles in one? Not only that, but Three Way simultaneously sends shots in three different directions: diagonally upwards, forwards and diagonally downwards.

BOOMER

As much a shield as a weapon, Boomers swirl around the player character's body deflecting enemy fire as they go. In addition, any foe that they make contact with takes two hits rather than one.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"We always wanted to be doing things that weren't in the ordinary; things that you weren't expecting. *Wolfchild* was a difficult game, but we were *real* gamers. We wanted something that would take weeks to finish. We didn't just want to waltz through it like with a lot of the games that were coming out."

JAGUAR XJ220

VARIOUS, 1992

Designed to take on Gremlin Graphics' *Lotus* games, *Jaguar XJ220* is a racing game in the vein of Sega's *Out Run* rather than an attempt to make a realistic driving sim. Where it differs from the coin-op is with its mechanics, in so much as you're competing in races for money against a set number of contestants – which often leaves you driving on an open road. *Jaguar XJ220*'s scope is also broader in that your car sustains damage that requires you to purchase replacement parts between races. Another of *XJ220*'s notable features is that the challenge of the game's courses is affected by weather and driving conditions, such as heavy rain, icy tarmac and sandy road surfaces

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"We felt most of the other car games on the market were crap, so we thought why not give it a go? We all loved the Gremlin *Lotus* games, and somehow I managed to secure the licence from Jaguar. We then put competing cars in there: Ferraris and whatever. But we didn't licence them. Those were the good old days – it was the Wild West!"

CHUCK ROCK II: SON OF CHUCK

VARIOUS, 1993

Although *Chuck Rock II* doesn't stray too far from the foundations laid by the original game, there are some fairly major differences that help to differentiate the sequel. Its subtitle is *Son Of Chuck*, appropriately enough since it stars Chuck's baby boy. Unlike Chuck, the second game's newly born protagonist is somehow highly skilled at swinging around a massive wooden club. The difference this makes to the follow-up's combat is that Chuck Junior's weapon has greater range than the heavy boulders his dad throws around in the first game. On the down side, Junior isn't able to hold rocks above his head for protection or pull off some of his dad's other tricks. But *Chuck Rock II* doesn't suffer from this omission too much, as its levels are designed around the capabilities of its pint-sized hero.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"Oh that's the one with the baby in it! It was fantastic. The company was incredibly creative, and you could do the wackiest things – that was where it all stemmed from. It was about the character being *Flintstone*-esque. So like Bam Bam, the baby in *The Flintstones*."

BANSHEE

VARIOUS, 1994

A love letter to coin-ops such as Capcom's *1942* and its sequels, Core's Amiga 1200 and CD32 exclusive adds lush AGA graphics to the proven formula. To the uninformed, *1942* is an epic top-down shoot-'em-up set in World War II that's designed to be hard as nails. It's fair to say that *Banshee* respects that last aspect of the Capcom shooter. It also retains the arcade game's focus on obtaining better weapons in order to give you at least a chance of not being shot out of the sky. Split across four huge and distinct levels – including a final mission set in space, *Banshee* incorporates endless airborne, seafaring and ground-based opponents. Special mention goes to its impressive screen-sized bosses, and the decision to end the game on another planet after the player's plane is made space-worthy.

MISSION BRIEFING

What you need to know to ace Core's shooter

ON THE LEVEL

Starting over a rain-lashed ocean, *Banshee* takes in an urban area, the arctic, a bleak desert and space before ending on another planet.

AWESOME OBJECTIVES

Beating *Banshee* is one tall order. After each wave of foes you're met with a sub-boss or two. Defeat those and you face a massive mayor.

WHO'S THE BOSS?

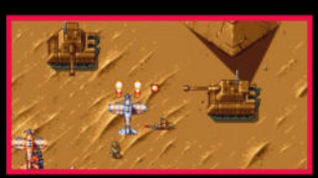
Banshee's early bosses are fairly normal – giant bombers, huge subs, etc. But after those expect colossal sentient insect-like machines!

COOL COLLECTABLES

There are 15 pick-ups in *Banshee*, including weapons like smart bombs and homing missiles, and items like speed boosts and extra shields.

CO-OP CAPERS

Since *Banshee* is seriously hard, you may need help. So how about recruiting a second player? After all, two pilots are better than one.



SOULSTAR

MEGA-CD, 1994

Based on its opening levels, you'd be forgiven for thinking *Soulstar* was an homage to Sega sprite-scaling shooters such as *Galaxy Force*. But while Core's immersive sci-fi title initially hurtles you through space and over the surface of a planet on rails, that all changes when you enter an enemy base for the game's second phase. This begins with a free-roaming third-person mission, where the Strike Craft you've been piloting transforms into a hovercraft-like Hover Copter. The Hover Copter allows you to seek and destroy a central computer before warping onto further stages, where you alternate between it and the Strike Craft in levels set undersea and an epically long tunnel. The game's final phase puts you in the seat of a Combat Walker – an armed mecha – which can run around at ground level and jet forwards through the air for short periods. Enhancing *Soulstar* further is its co-op mode, where one player acts as pilot while the other is the gunner.

BC RACERS

VARIOUS, 1994

Employing the same sprite-scaling tech as *Soulstar*, *BC Racers* concludes Core's *Chuck Rock* trilogy with a violent into-the-screen racing title. The cast have been fleshed out beyond Chuck and Junior in order to give a range of competitors to choose from, with vehicles that provide differing levels of acceleration, speed and energy. A nice touch is that there are two characters per vehicle, with different crews having differing strengths of attacks. As well as allowing Chuck Rock and his son to compete together, having two-seater vehicles also lets drivers attack rivals from one side while their passenger launches assaults from the other side. *BC Racers* has four difficulty levels and an eclectic range of courses, including tracks set at sunset and at night, and environments ranging from deserts and jungles to frozen and fiery lands. Further variety is added in later levels by ramps and boosts.

ASTERIX AND THE POWER OF THE GODS

MEGA DRIVE, 1995

A non-linear platformer with logistic puzzles and collectables, *Asterix And The Power Of The Gods* involves a degree of exploration, in that you chart your own course on a map. It's also interactive, and the characters you meet often offer helpful advice. There's a beat-'em-up element, as you have to fight off the Roman legionnaires that you encounter, and you can pull off various different attacks. These are different for each of the two player characters you have access to, and you can swap from one to the other between levels. This can be quite important, as some stages are best tackled as the small but agile Asterix, while others suit the talents of his oafish but stronger companion Obelix.

ECLECTIC ELEMENTS

The different aspects of Core's cartoon platformer

EPIC EXPLORATION

Although not quite open world, *Power Of The Gods* gives you the choice of which level to attempt from the stages that you've managed to unlock.

PERPLEXING PUZZLES

You solve the numerous puzzles in *Power Of The Gods* by interacting with objects. You can flick switches to open doors and you can use items to gain height.

FRENETIC FIGHTING

Asterix And The Power Of The Gods could have just had one attack per character, but instead Asterix and Obelix can each assault foes using three unique moves.

POLISHED PLATFORMING

Far from being limited to simple left-to-right platforming, *Power Of The Gods* involves sky-high vertical challenges and destructible scenery.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"Core did *Power Of The Gods* for Sega. Sega liked Core because it made games that had good gameplay, and the Japanese loved gameplay. Sega was very instrumental during that period, because it awarded Core a publishing licence, and there were only five other companies in Europe that had publisher status."

TOMB RAIDER

VARIOUS, 1996

Groundbreaking in that it was one of the first polygon-driven 3D adventures, *Tomb Raider* defied convention with its female protagonist at a time when games were typically fronted by male characters. Not only did its hero Lara Croft became a global icon for her looks and attitude, her debut title also wowed players, and set the tone for 32-bit gaming. *Tomb Raider*'s appeal stems from its immersive exploration, its well-thought-out puzzles and its kill-or-be-killed encounters with extinct and endangered predators.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"The way we had the 3D engine, the graphics and level design had never been done before, so people were blown away by that. Secondly, there was this female character bouncing around the screen, shooting dinosaurs and tigers, and everything she shouldn't have been shooting! That was a recipe for success. It was never going to fail, looking back at it now."

SWAGMAN

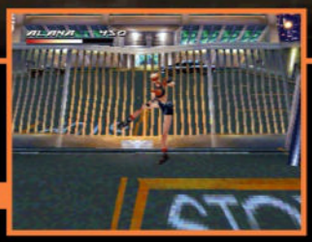
VARIOUS, 1997

The sort of game that not many developers were making during the PlayStation era, *Swagman* is a top-down 2D arcade-style adventure where progress depends on equal measures of dexterity, problem solving and enemy bashing. If you get stuck, hints can be obtained by interacting with friendly non-player characters, but half the fun is working out how to unlock new areas of the game. *Swagman* is stuffed full of obstructive and scary opponents that chime well with the idea that the game is a child's nightmare come true. You can swat these away with an appropriate number of swipes, but of course that doesn't protect you from foes that have ranged weapons. For that you need to find a device that gives you long-range projectiles of your own. Overall, what makes *Swagman* work so well is that its gameplay is well honed and nicely balanced, with no one aspect of its eclectic challenge overstaying its welcome before giving way for one of a contrasting type.

FIGHTING FORCE

VARIOUS, 1997

Designed to be a 3D reboot of the *Streets Of Rage* series, Core's *Fighting Force* captures the essence of Sega's 2D 16-bit brawler in a 3D polygon world. You play the role of one of four fighters, each with their own unique attributes and fighting style. Your objective is to battle your way through a series of increasingly hard encounters as part of an on-rails mission, tackling hoards of foes that typically attack in numbers. Each player character has a special move that can take out their surrounding foes in one fell swoop, but using these rapidly depletes the protagonist's energy. As with the *Streets Of Rage* games, a winning strategy in *Fighting Force* is to appropriate fallen enemies' weapons or use everyday objects as makeshift armaments. *Fighting Force*'s co-op mode provides another way to even the odds, but you have to be careful that your attacks don't accidentally connect with your partner.



BRAWLING BASICS

How to take back the streets

FIGHTING FOURSOME

The *Fighting Force* heroes have pros and cons. Important considerations are the reach of their attacks and the power behind their punches.

SMOOTH MOVES

Each of the characters has special moves. For example, Alana can pull off a spin scissor kick while Smasher simply pounds the ground.

OBJECT LESSON

If objects in *Fighting Force* are too big to use as weapons then try smashing them up. If pieces fall off you can use them as projectiles. Very handy.

UNUSUAL ENEMIES

The majority of opponents in *Fighting Force* are suited thugs or martial arts experts, but you also fight with the likes of hotel porters! Poor guys.

DOUBLE TROUBLE

You face the same challenge in *Fighting Force*'s co-op mode as playing it solo, but as you fight in close quarters special moves are riskier to use.

TOMB RAIDER II

VARIOUS, 1997

The original wasn't broken, so when it came to *Tomb Raider II* Core didn't have too much to fix. Not that it repeated itself, of course, the sequel delivers an entirely fresh challenge. But the second game has the same sort of fiendish puzzles, tricky platforming, epic exploration and heart-stopping encounters with vicious animals that make the first game so compelling. Added to the mix are vehicles that Lara drives around environments she doesn't encounter in the original, and new tests of agility such as zip lines and climbing. The follow-up's new supplementary weapons range from machine guns and grenade launchers to harpoons.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"You have so many amazing locations around the world. You could be in Venice, and then you could have a secret clan there as the baddies. We could have a snowmobile and a Jeep. But the turnaround was incredibly fast. People wanted the series to evolve, but they didn't realise how little time we had."

TOMB RAIDER III: THE ADVENTURES OF LARA CROFT

VARIOUS, 1998

Great efforts were made to distinguish *Tomb Raider III* from its predecessors in order to appeal to jaded gamers while at the same time not abandoning the things that made the earlier games so popular with fans. As well as running on a new engine that allows for more detailed environments, *Tomb Raider III* introduces various new gameplay features to the series. There are environmental hazards such as quicksand that can be waded through at the risk of Lara getting sucked under, and underwater sections where the currents drag her down or where the temperature is so low that she can only survive swimming through them for short spells. The third game also goes big on vehicles, including a kayak, quad bike, a boat and a mine cart. *Tomb Raider III* has all the weapons from *Tomb Raider II* and more, but a more interesting aspect of the third game is where Lara is stripped of firearms and has to use stealth to avoid her enemies.

PROJECT EDEN

VARIOUS, 2001

Built around the concept of controlling four team members with different skillsets, *Project Eden* is best described as *Tomb Raider* with delegation and a sci-fi setting. What also sets it apart from Core's earlier title is its linear narrative, which is driven along by a sequence of set missions, each of which have to be accomplished before the next is rolled out. There's also an element of trial and error to *Project Eden*, where even if there's no one correct team member to use on a mission then there's probably one who's the most suitable for the job.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"Around about that time, we were looking at trends that were happening outside the videogames world, and there were superhero movies coming out where they joined forces. So the fact that *Project Eden* was about four people with different abilities was driven by that."

THUNDERHAWK: OPERATION PHOENIX

PLAYSTATION 2, 2001

The jump in aesthetic quality between the original 16-bit *Thunderhawk* and this PS2 sequel is remarkable, but in many ways the third game follows the formula established by the first one very closely. In terms of visuals, *Operation Phoenix* depicts far more realistic environments, but in terms of structure it retains the same mission-based formula as the game that it's based on. Where it improves vastly in terms of gameplay is with the sheer number and variety of opponents that it throws at you at any one time. Then in terms of level design, where the original *Thunderhawk* is limited to flat surfaces with small raised structures, *Operation Phoenix* has hills and valleys, snow-topped mountains and vast, detailed structures like oil rigs. Everything that makes the first game great is still there, however – the mission briefings, arming your helicopter pre-mission with the weapons you think will work best for the job at hand, and a difficulty curve that requires genuine skill to overcome rather than an itchy trigger finger. Essentially, *Operation Phoenix* offers a more intense and immersive experience than was possible with the original.

HERDY GERDY

PLAYSTATION 2, 2002

In Core's whimsical adventure, a young boy named Gerdy has to learn how to herd weird creatures to save his island from an evil wizard. What makes this interesting is that different creatures require different herding techniques – you chase some, others follow you and one wants to eat you and the other creatures! A rich narrative adds depth, and introduces sidequests to earn useful herding tools.

JEREMY'S MEMORIES

"Sadly, *Herdy Gerdy* didn't quite work in the end, but it was so close. It took us forever to bloody write it, and at some stage I had to say that enough was enough. But for originality and styling it was amazing."

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS

VARIOUS, 2003

There's no doubting the ambition of Core's final *Tomb Raider* title, and this approach is exemplified by its strides towards realism. Instead of boundless energy, Lara has limited stamina. Once exhausted, she's left with no energy to complete her current action. This can have fatal consequences in some situations, like if she's hanging from a ledge or overhead cable. The solution is to first build up her strength, by pushing heavy objects, for example. Encounters with NPCs are more realistic too, in that your responses affect your progress, and rather than charging into situations Lara has stealth attacks. Perhaps if Core had played it safe with *The Angel Of Darkness* it might have survived longer, but like Lara, playing it safe wasn't in its DNA.

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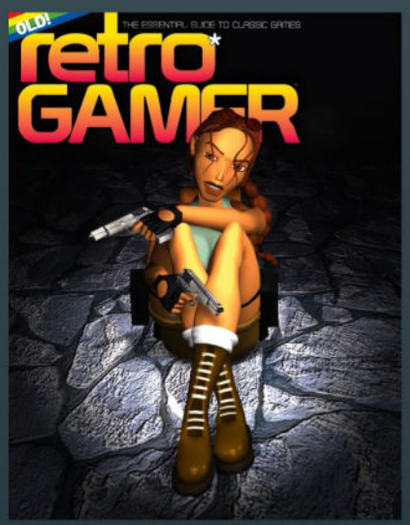	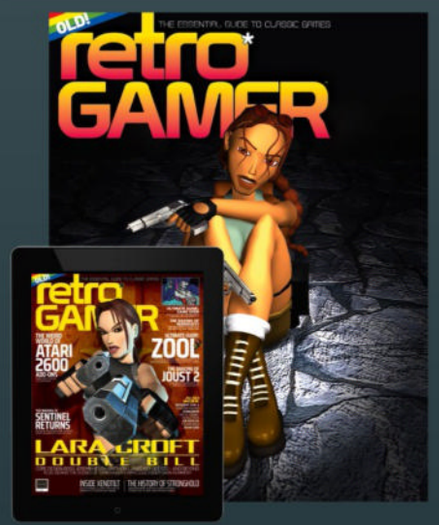	
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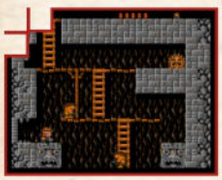
THE MAKING OF TOMB RAIDER II

HAVING TO FOLLOW ONE OF THE MOST ICONIC GAMES OF ALL TIME IS A HIGH-CLASS PROBLEM TO HAVE, BUT A PROBLEM ALL THE SAME. GAVIN RUMMERY TELLS US HOW CORE DESIGN MANAGED TO ENSURE THAT TOMB RAIDER II LIVED UP TO THE HYPE

WORDS BY NICK THORPE



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RICK DANGEROUS (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ATARI ST, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1989

CHUCK ROCK
SYSTEM: AMIGA, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1991

SOULSTAR
SYSTEM: MEGA-CD
YEAR: 1994

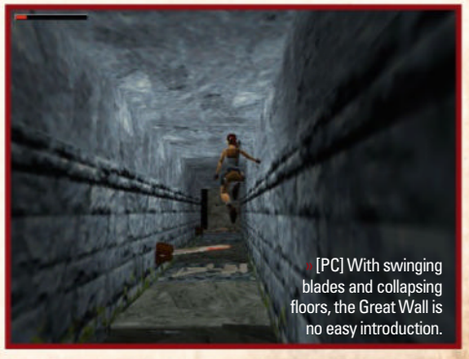
Creating a true smash-hit success is a feeling unlike anything else in the world. You struggle and toil away at something, much of the process taking place well away from the public gaze, and suddenly all eyes are on the thing you created. *Tomb Raider* was a cultural phenomenon from the very first outing, an enormous achievement for a small band of coders in Derby whose best-known creation before that was a caveman with a name that described his abilities, 'Large Stone Thrower' or something like that. [Do you mean *Chuck Rock*? – Ed] But having the eyes of the world on you is a double-edged sword. In 1996, the team at Core Design would have been happy with a magazine cover or two – in 1997, Lara Croft could even make the cover of non-gaming magazines. Everybody knew that a *Tomb Raider* sequel was on the way, and expectations were sky high.

The original *Tomb Raider* had set a new standard for 3D action adventure games, and there are two schools of thought when it comes to following up a revolutionary game like that. Some developers seek to replicate the impact of the original, others look to quickly serve an improved second helping to a hungry audience, and both approaches have risks. Taking the former approach can be both expensive and more importantly time-consuming, potentially allowing other developers to catch up and the players shifting their attention elsewhere. Go for the latter and it's possible that your improvements will fall short of expectations, leading to accusations that you've served up more of the same.

"We mainly wanted to make a worthy sequel that kept what was good about the original but enhanced the experience," says Gavin Rummery, lead programmer of *Tomb Raider II*. "Design discussions about the sequel started immediately after the original shipped, but development didn't start in earnest until the new year as some of us were still finishing up language versions and demo disks for *Tomb Raider* on the run up to Christmas. Then we had about ten months to get the sequel built." An iterative sequel was the only choice with that kind of time frame. Toby Gard, the lead artist and concept creator for the original, and Paul Douglas, the lead programmer of the first game, famously did not return for the sequel, but most of the team did so the foundations were solid.

One of the first areas that the team looked at was control – a necessity given the fast pace of overall improvements in 3D game design at the ▶

[PlayStation] That first sight of sky is designed to stun, after the original game's caverns.



[PC] With swinging blades and collapsing floors, the Great Wall is no easy introduction.

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** EIDOS INTERACTIVE
» **DEVELOPER:** CORE DESIGN
» **RELEASED:** 1997
» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION, PC
» **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

OLD AND COLD

GAVIN EXPLAINS THE ORIGIN OF WINSTON THE BUTLER

One of the most infamous features of *Tomb Raider II* is the ability to carry out an act of bizarre cruelty by locking Lara Croft's butler Winston in the walk-in freezer at her mansion. If you've played it, you've almost certainly done it. Don't worry, we're not judging you – we've done it too, as well as just about everyone else. But how did this odd inclusion come about? "Winston was a very last-minute addition to the game," Gavin recalls. "Our second animator, Joss [Jocelyn Charmet], had finished everything that was needed for the game, but had the idea that Lara should have a butler – Joss was French, and to him this is what upper-class Brits would have. I was originally sceptical that Lara was the kind of girl to want a butler, but we hit on the excuse that he'd come with the house.

"It took all of about three days from Joss suggesting the idea to him creating the character and animations, and me putting him in the game, because he doesn't do much." Indeed, Winston just follows Lara around as you play the tutorial level, never quite making a nuisance of himself but never going away. "I don't know who first thought to lock him in the freezer, but I wasn't really aware it was a thing till the game released and people started to do it to stop Winston following them around," says Gavin. "Heather had just added the walk-in freezer as part of trying to add interesting things to Lara's house – it hadn't been intended for it to be used in that way at all!"

» [PC] "Winston, could you be a dear and choose a cut of meat for tonight's dinner?"

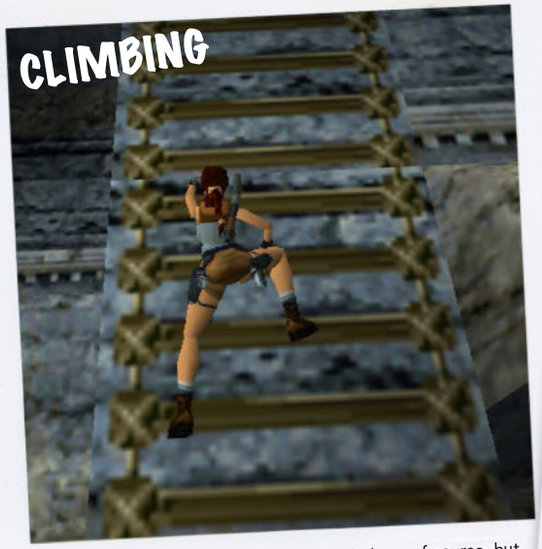
» [PC] "And while you're in there, take some time to chill out!" "Very good, ma'am."

GAVIN RUMMERY

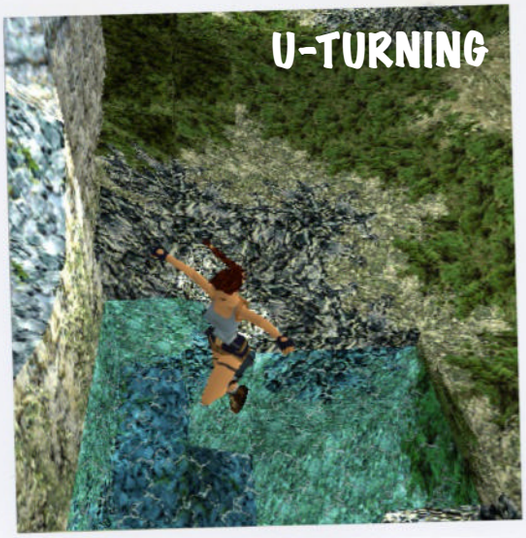
After working on the original game, Gavin became the lead programmer for *Tomb Raider II* at Core Design.

SHE'S GOT THE MOVES

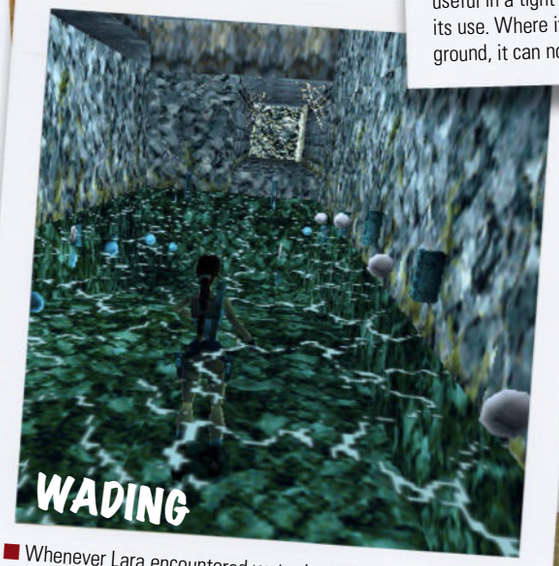
THE NEW ABILITIES LARA GAINED IN HER SECOND ADVENTURE



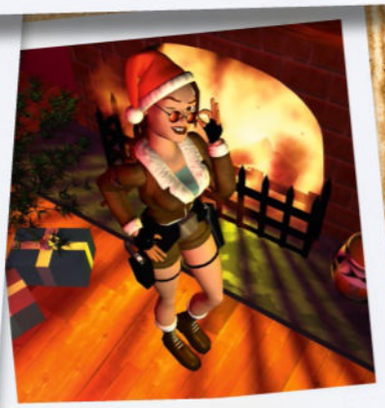
■ Lara could always haul herself up over ledges, of course, but *Tomb Raider II* introduces ladders to climb. Where reaching a high place previously necessitated an elaborate jumping puzzle or a series of ledges, the obvious solution is now available.



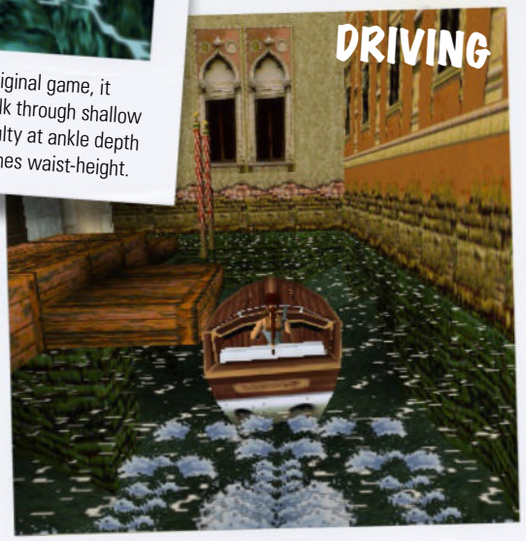
■ Lara's emergency roll from the original game was really useful in a tight spot – so useful that Core saw fit to expand its use. Where it could previously be performed on the ground, it can now be used in mid-air and while swimming.



■ Whenever Lara encountered water in the original game, it was always deep water. Now she's able to walk through shallow waters rather than swimming, with little difficulty at ankle depth and a considerable speed penalty when it reaches waist-height.



■ Dynamic lighting was all the rage in the late-Nineties, and what better way to show it off than to create some really dark places? Lara can now light flares, temporarily allowing her – and you, crucially – to see her surroundings.



■ Sometimes, even the most experienced adventurer could do with some mechanical help when conditions demand it. Lara can use a motorboat to navigate the canals of Venice, and can use a snowmobile to blast through Tibet.

» [PC] Having humans accompanied by attack dogs is a good way to mix up enemy types.

time. "At its most basic, there were various things about the way Lara controlled that we thought we could improve," Gavin remembers. "One of the first things was allowing Lara to jump the instant the jump button was pressed rather than waiting for a specific point in her animation to make the general hopping around feel more responsive. There were various other small changes like that in the controls to speed up animations that were sluggish, to make everything feel a bit smoother."

While those kinds of improvements will definitely improve the feel of a game, they run the risk of going unnoticed. Fortunately, some major additions were also on the cards. "We wanted to fill out her moveset to remove some of the restrictions that existed for the level designers," explains Gavin. "For example, in the original game, Lara was either in the water or out, and so every pool needed to be like a swimming pool that she dived into. In *Tomb Raider II* we added all the animations to allow her to wade through any depth of water, so the level designers could have shallow pools and the like. They also wanted to allow Lara to be able to gain height more quickly, so we added the climbing moves."

It's arguable that while Lara Croft was the face of the first game, the locations were the real heart of it. The air of mystery about them was unmatched, and the desire to explore them was a matter of instinctive curiosity more than anything else. However, there was a slight problem. "We had used up the majority of the most well-known ancient civilisation ruins and tombs on the first game," says Gavin. Fortunately, a suitable approach avoided a situation of having to revisit *Tomb Raider* without the tombs. "The level designers Heather [Gibson] and Neal [Boyd] were keen to branch out into some more modern settings, including 'modern tombs' like the levels based on the sunken ship."

The new approach to level designs required one major change to the graphics. "We also wanted Lara to feel like she was outside, instead of the black sky of the original, and so added a skybox and the logic to make that work with the limited draw distances available at the time," Gavin explains.

That wasn't the only graphical change that would have an impact on the level design, as the addition of dynamic lighting allowed for darkened areas that Lara could light up herself. Some additions were purely cosmetic, though. "I also had a desire to get Lara's ponytail working as it was such a key part of her character design, but in the original the attempts to get it working had failed and so she'd ended up with her hair up in a bun. Fortunately I figured out a cheap way to simulate it that looked pretty good," Gavin recalls.

» [PC] Venice makes for a great *Tomb Raider* setting thanks to the abundance of water.

A rather more major feature that had been planned for the original game also managed to make it into the sequel. "We'd also wanted to add vehicles in the first game but didn't have the time, so that was also a goal," says Gavin. "We initially planned on a motorbike, but needed something that wouldn't look daft if you were crashing it into walls – with a motorbike you'd expect it to fall over and Lara to go flying, and that was just too complicated for what we could do at the time," he elaborates. "We decided on the boat and snowmobile because they were 'stable' machines that Lara could hop in and out of, which was relatively innovative at the time as most games had special 'vehicle levels' where the player spent the entire level attached to the vehicle." We'd expect such a major feature to cause some major headaches, but according to Gavin that wasn't the case. "I don't remember any specific problems in the implementation. Stuart Atkinson (the animator) and I hit on a way of doing everything using animations, so it used systems we already had working rather than fancy physics."

One major aspect of the game that was overhauled was the result of player feedback from the original game "The one consistent bit of feedback we got about the original was that people wanted more combat as the tombs could get pretty empty after the initial enemies were dispatched," Gavin tells us. "Of course, when we added more combat in the sequel, all the people who'd been happy with the lack of combat in the original complained, proving you can't please all the people all the time!" In order to emphasise the combat, Gavin and the team had to tackle the problems of the first game's battles. "We did try and improve the combat over the original as it was always the weakest aspect. The concept of Lara auto-targeting and the player therefore concentrating on leaping around was great in theory but not quite so cool as it sounded in practice," he tells us. "One aspect of the original was the lack of human enemies which made it spectacularly easy for

» [PC] The fall won't kill Lara, but the angry dogs below might well do.

» [PC] This swinging crate is quite a nuisance – who put that there, do you think?

Lara to avoid damage by simply standing on a block and blasting the enemies from safety.

"To try and improve things we added a few more dodge moves, including being able to flip in the air to spin 180 degrees. We also added more variety to the weapons: the grenade launcher and M16, and a harpoon gun for underwater. And lots more human enemies so Lara had to move around more to avoid taking damage. There was also the fun level where the monks fought with you, so long as you didn't shoot them. But the general consensus over the years is that we went too far and added too much combat in *Tomb Raider II*. If I could go back in time, that's the one aspect of the game I'd tone down a bit."

One location that Lara would ultimately not venture to was the Sega Saturn. The original game had been very demanding on the console and didn't perform quite as well as the PlayStation and PC versions, so accommodating the ambition of the sequel was always going to be tricky. In an interview with Next Generation Online, Adrian Smith said, "If we looked long and hard enough at it, we could have done another Saturn version, but I think we might have been compromising what we wanted to do on the PlayStation and PC." He noted that *Tomb Raider* was not a good fit for the hardware, stating, "There was no way we could gain improvement from the Saturn version because we couldn't make use of things like Mode 7 floors." In the end, Sony had the final word, signing an exclusivity deal that kept Lara off of other consoles until the year 2000.

Even without the Saturn to worry about there were some headaches to overcome, as Gavin explains. "Heather wanted a lift in the Opera House which sounded pretty straightforward but ended up being a huge headache. Lara's entire control system was written assuming the ground wasn't moving, and in a lift that isn't true. It caused endless bugs and grief, and given it only appears in that one level really wasn't worth it," he recalls. "We also had a bit of crazy fun with the final dragon that had too many joints for our animation system to handle. So it is actually made of two separate parts that move together, a bit like a pantomime horse!"

Despite the short development period, the team fired on all cylinders. Nathan McCree had the opportunity to compose much more music than in the first game, greatly enhancing the atmosphere, and the graphic artists were able to create new outfits for Lara to match her environments. Writer Vicky Arnold tied the levels together with a new tale, based on Lara's quest for the Dagger Of Xian, a magical weapon that could turn its owner into a dragon. This time the primary antagonist would be Marco Bartoli, who sought the power of the treasure for himself, and Lara's conflict with his Fiammi Nera group would see her escaping situations including being imprisoned without any weapons. Feeling that the final fight against the dragon wasn't a fitting ending, the team actually added a final stage in which Lara's mansion is besieged by enemies.

"Amazingly we achieved everything we set out to do, and even had time towards the end to cram in extra elements like the final Home Sweet Home level and Winston the butler," says Gavin. "But it required working about six months of crunch which was very wearing."

Although that effort took a toll on the team, the results were truly stunning. *Tomb Raider II* is the kind of game that opens with intent – even as early as the tutorial at Lara's mansion, it's easy to tell that the instruction is more robust than in the previous game and the inclusion of a time trial element is welcome. But it's when you first arrive at the Great Wall stage that you're really hit by the new elements, and that's by design. As soon as possible, the camera swings around to give you the view of a passing helicopter, showing off the brand-new sky that emphasises the outdoor setting. You'll need to approach a shallow pool of water in order to start making your way up the wall, and once you get there a tiger appears to give you a chance to test your new combat agility.

If you were to say that sounds like a bit of a hectic introduction, you wouldn't be wrong. *Tomb Raider II* is definitely positioned to be a challenge for fans of the first game, and that means that the overall difficulty level is higher – the traps are trickier, the enemies are that bit smarter and key puzzle elements are sometimes disguised quite cleverly. Perhaps in order to compensate for this increase in challenge, the PlayStation version allowed players to save at any point in the game, rather than having to find save crystals as in the first game. This wasn't a major change for PC players of course, as this ability was included in the very first game.

GOING FOR GOLD

A LOOK AT THE OFFICIAL EXPANSION FOR TOMB RAIDER II

Although *Tomb Raider* is a series that is commonly associated with the PlayStation consoles, it was PC owners that arguably received the most love in the early days of the series. The first three *Tomb Raider* games all received expansion packs that were only made available to the computer crowd, and *Tomb Raider II* has the most interesting of the three. Where the first and third games bulk out their respective plots, the *Golden Mask* expansion takes the mechanics of *Tomb Raider II* and creates a brand-new mini-adventure with them.

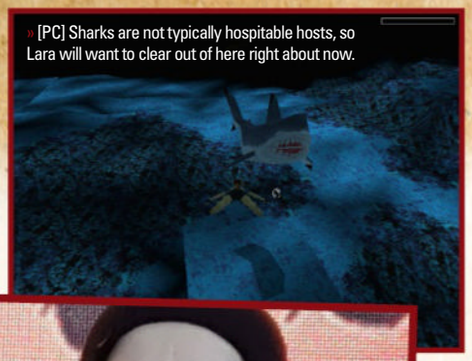
The plot of the expansion sees Lara travelling to Melnikov Island in the Bering Sea between Alaska and Russia, in search of the titular artefact – the Mask Of Tornarsuk. Naturally she's not the only one after it, and mercenaries are already present on the island, as well as the usual array of hostile animals that seem to greet the adventurer wherever she travels. Over the course of four stages Lara gets to discover that the Soviet Union had stationed people on the island in the past, and eventually has to defeat a guardian to claim the treasure. Should you beat this little adventure and find all 12 secrets, a bonus fifth stage titled Nightmare In Vegas becomes available.

Although the PlayStation never received an official version of the *Golden Mask*, a fan who goes by the online handle b122251 managed to create an unofficial port of the adventure in 2019. This was an impressive feat – since these levels were not designed to run on the PlayStation version, various tweaks and even adjustments to the game saving code were required to get them working.

» [PlayStation] The fan-made PlayStation conversion is really quite an impressive bit of work.

» [PC] Aboard the offshore rig, enemies like to attack Lara with big metal pipes. How welcoming.

» [PC] Often, intriguing gameplay arises from simply solving the question, "OK, how do I get up there?"



» [PC] Sharks are not typically hospitable hosts, so Lara will want to clear out of here right about now.

RAPID RAIDER

TWITCH STREAMER TAYLORMADEAIDENTAYLOR DISCUSSES SPEEDRUNNING TOMB RAIDER II

How did you first encounter *Tomb Raider II*?
My mum said to me and my brother that we could pick any game we want from this catalogue. All we had was the image of the game to go on, so we picked *Tekken* and *Tomb Raider* and I remember specifically it was the covers and just seeing Lara Croft captured me. I think I was about six years old, and before that every game I played was *Mario* or *Zelda* so it was the first time a female protagonist caught my eye.

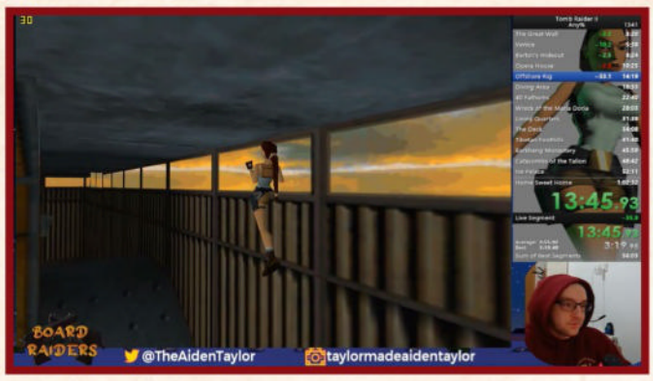
What made an impression when you played the game?
It was the exploration and the puzzles, and feeling like I was outsmarting the game even though that was the intended way of playing it. Also the sort of fantastical elements that came in every now and then, and the music played a big part as well – it was familiar, but otherworldly at the same time.

What inspired you to go back and start speedrunning the game?
It was during lockdown, and I honestly don't know. Speedrunning interested me when I first discovered it, but I was never interested in the sort of speedruns where the games are completely broken. With *Tomb Raider* speedrunning, you're doing the movements that developers intended but in a way that they didn't intend, if that makes sense – like you're using the jump mechanics to go through walls and things.

Your personal best is 59:24 – what was the most difficult technique you had to learn to get your time under an hour?
I think the hardest thing to learn is that you're going to fail a bunch, and that you're going to reset a bunch. You're going to see Great Wall a thousand times and you have to mentally prepare yourself for that. It's just the motivation when you've been doing it for four hours and you're still in Great Wall, it's really hard to get over sometimes.

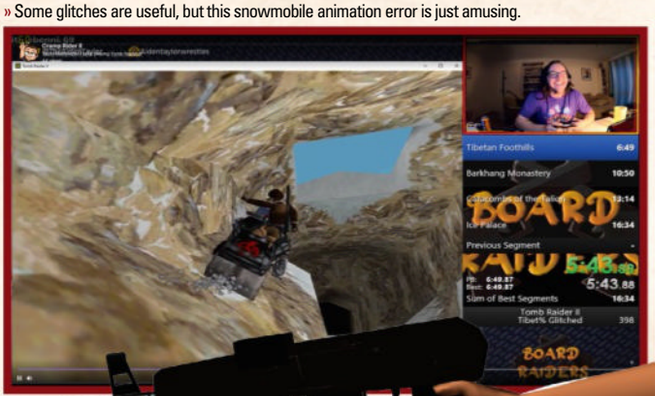
You're part of a community, Board Raiders – who are they and what do they do?
I found about it through another streamer called Beckski, she's represented the game at GDQ (Games Done Quick) a number of times. It was watching her that actually showed me how it's done. With normal speedrunning, the main categories are just either glitched or no glitches. But other people like to do challenge runs where they have to do it without killing any of the enemies, or just doing specific levels as quickly as possible, which requires different strategies. There are leaderboards for these but they're not as full as the main ones, so the goal of Board Raiders (@boardraiders on Twitter) is to just get everyone who normally just runs the full game to do these other categories.

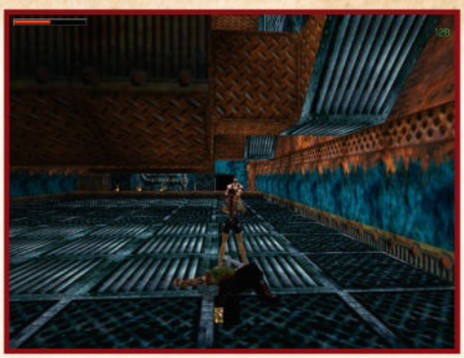
Why is *Tomb Raider II* the game you come back to the most?
Tomb Raider II was always my favourite. I like two for different reasons than I like one, but I think the movement mechanics of two just feel smooth. I think the nostalgia does help – I do really think fondly of *Tomb Raider II* more than I do the other ones, despite loving the first one as much as I do.



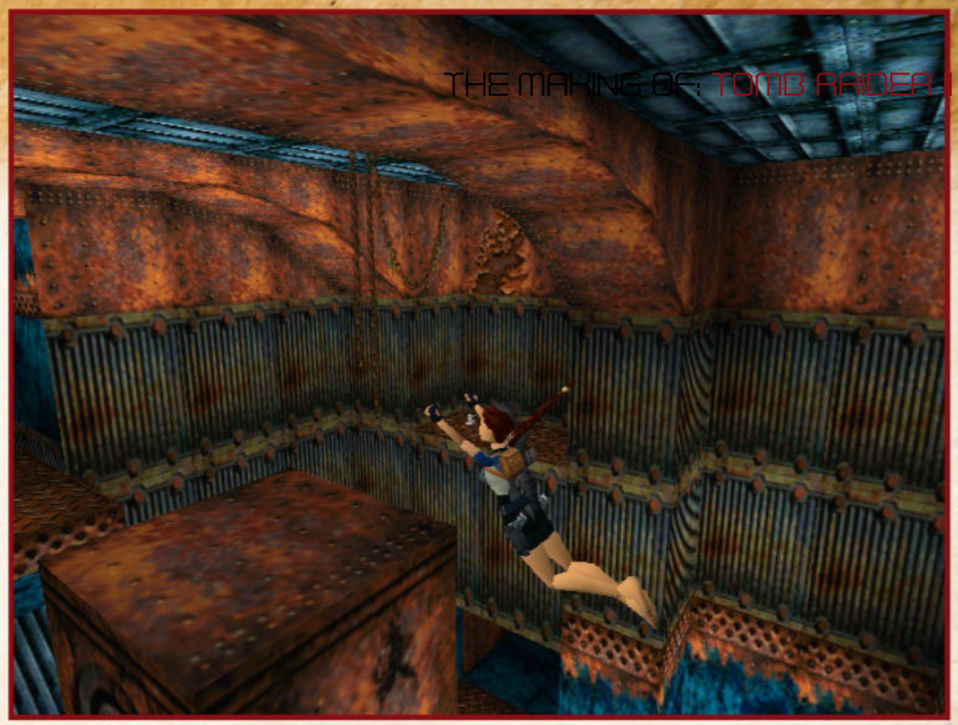
» Lara straddles the wall, saving time and making it look painful in the process.

» Some glitches are useful, but this snowmobile animation error is just amusing.





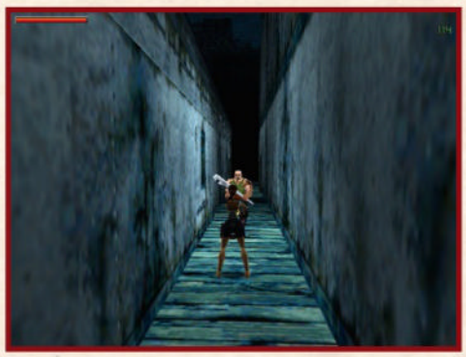
» [PC] Standing atop the corpse of a fallen enemy, Lara uses her machine gun to create another.



» [PC] No matter how often you make those fingertip jumps, it's always a thrilling moment.

Tomb Raider II launched in November 1997, to an overwhelmingly positive critical reception. *Edge* gave it 9/10, saying that it "stretches the PlayStation in particular to new heights of coding excellence and introduces several new twists", but noting that "some may see it as a conservative retread of the original". *Play* gave the game 95%, noting that the lack of combat opportunities in the original "seems to have been addressed with plenty of animals and, in particular, lots more gun-toting humans to shoot at". *GamesMaster* felt that the shift towards modern environments and extra combat meant that, "If Indiana Jones was a good reference point for the original, in this sequel there's a subtle shift to 007," and gave a score of 92%. *The Official UK PlayStation Magazine*'s 10/10 review commented on the difficulty of the game, noting that it was "quite a bit harder" but that the ability to save anywhere meant that the game "loses some of its flow to the continual ghastly interruptions of the loading screen". Other scores included 95% from *PlayStation Plus*, 5/5 from *CVG* and 94% from *PC Gamer*.

The game was exactly the kind of commercial success that Core Design and its owner Eidos had hoped for. *Tomb Raider II* earned multiple sales awards and became the second best-selling PlayStation game ever in the UK, behind only *Rayman*. The game has sold over seven million copies in its lifetime, putting it roughly on par with the original. A sequel was inevitable, but the extended crunch and need to have the third game ready within a year ultimately proved too much for the team. Rather than working on *Tomb Raider III*, key team members including Gavin, level designers Heather Gibson and Neal Boyd, and animators Stuart Atkinson and Jocelyn Charmet all moved on to work on *Project Eden*, a PS2 game for which Gavin also wrote the script and original concept.



» [PC] Flares aren't the only way to light up an area – the M16 can help too.

» [PC] A deft hop backwards prevented Lara from getting a deathly case of brain freeze.

Now that the *Tomb Raider* series has been a fixture of the gaming landscape for decades, it's easy to look back at *Tomb Raider II* and think that its success was virtually assured, especially given the amount of hype and expectation surrounding it. To think that is to forget how difficult it is to repeat a success, and the team at Core Design performed admirably with the pressure of a tight deadline and the eyes of the world upon them. If *Tomb Raider* is the game that made a star of Lara Croft, *Tomb Raider II* is the one that confirmed that she would be no flash in the pan, solidifying the series and setting it up for further sequels, a Hollywood adaptation and mountains of merchandise.

For those reasons, the game is fondly remembered by fans as one of the highlights of the series and Gavin is also fond of it in retrospect. "I've always personally been very happy with *Tomb Raider II*. We actually finished everything we planned to do, whereas in the original we were hit with a deadline we could barely meet and so the end of the game was rushed and slightly incomplete – you were supposed to escape from a collapsing pyramid whilst battling monsters all the way, but in the game there's about two bits of falling masonry, a wobbly camera, and an escape chute that ends the level," he explains. "On the sequel we were well into our stride, and everything we added was trying to improve weaknesses in the original and trying to make it a more complete experience that had more variety and a bit of everything we could do at the time," he continues. "So I guess fans responded to all that, and for many it is one of the earliest *Tomb Raider*s they ever played so it has a special place in their hearts." It definitely does, and we'd hazard a guess that more than a few of them will now be raiding their collections to give it another play – and just as in 1997, it'll be a thrilling adventure. ✱

Air Rescue

THIS WHIRLYBIRD WON'T FLY

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1992 » SIMS

There have been countless games over the years that have failed to successfully execute an interesting concept, and sadly *Air Rescue* is one of them. It's not a complex idea – basically it's just a bit like *Choplifter* but with a greater variety of settings, like a burning skyscraper and underground caves. I've owned this game for years and once every few years, I convince myself that I was just rubbish at it as a kid and it's probably quite good. Filled to the brim with confidence, I set off for the far side of the first stage and immediately fail in my first attempt at a rescue.

The game's collision detection often feels quite suspect, which is quite a problem when you're required to navigate tight spaces. Compounding the frustration, the helicopter is slow to respond to your inputs and doesn't always change the direction it's facing when you want it to. Then there are minor frustrations like the fact that you can't just land your helicopter to pick up evacuees, and the game's failure to remind you that you have a different weapon equipped in each stage, which is a bit irritating when you switch from angled missile fire to straight gunfire.

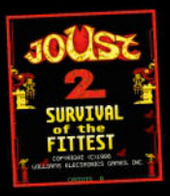
I recently returned to the game and rediscovered all of these petty frustrations, but this time I also discovered that there's a cheat mode. As well as standard options to start with extra lives and select your starting stage, it gives you three options to change the helicopter's inertia. At last, I'd found the thing that was finally going to make the game what I'd always wanted it to be – or so I thought. The best of the options was only a minor improvement and of course it did absolutely nothing to address all of the other problems. I think it's a sign that I need to make this my last mission with *Air Rescue*.

THE MAKING OF JOUST 2

SURVIVAL of the FITTEST

JOUST WAS A TRUE ORIGINAL AND A BONA FIDE CLASSIC OF THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARCADE VIDEOGAMES, BUT THE SEQUEL HAD ITS WINGS CLIPPED BEFORE IT EVEN HAD A CHANCE TO SPREAD THEM. DESIGNER JOHN NEWCOMER AND PROGRAMMERS KRISTINA DONOFRIO AND WARREN DAVIS SPIT FEATHERS

WORDS BY PAUL DRURY



IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** WILLIAMS
- **DEVELOPER:** WILLIAMS
- **RELEASED:** 1986
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **GENRE:** FLAP-'EM-UP

It's the summer of 1982 and John Newcomer, designer of *Joust*, is watching his game collecting quarters in arcades across America. It's a supremely satisfying moment, given how many industry insiders doubted this strange game, which replaced the ubiquitous fire button with one marked 'flap', would ever be a hit. Yet even then, he was mulling over what could have been.

"I'd have liked to add more variety in terms of levels and ledge layouts," John explains. "I wish I'd had more memory to put in more characters. I would've messed about with the layouts and taken some risks. I wish I'd made it, not harder, but more challenging. There's a difference in making something harder just to force someone off the machine and making it more of a puzzle, something to challenge you and keep you working at [the game]. I mean, you really weren't supposed to be able to beat the pterodactyl that easily!"

Be careful what you wish for, as the saying goes. After enjoying several very fruitful years at Williams at the start of the Eighties, as its first in-house game designer, a new role in the industry, John had left when the arcade market tanked in the middle of the decade. He joined rivals Gottlieb for a short period, during its time trading as Mylstar, before being tempted back to Williams in February 1986. And almost the first thing he was asked to do was revisit his most successful game.

"It wasn't the *Joust* I wanted to do, though," says John, ruefully. "The whole thing was a sales-driven decision, something I regret to this day. Williams wasn't selling anything, so the marketing department had this idea of making money by selling conversion kits, as there were so many vertical monitors out there housing old games like *Pac-Man* and *Ms Pac-Man*. They'd already asked Vid Kidz [the company set up by *Defender* creators Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar] to do a sequel to *Robotron*, but they said, 'No way,' because [of the stipulation] it had to be on a vertical monitor."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JOUST
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982

SINISTAR
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1983

MYSTIC MARATHON (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1984

» [Arcade] It takes a special kind of player to get to level 92 – this screen was snapped during Robert Griffin's MAME world-record breaking run.

» [Arcade] The Knight Lord awaits on level 12.

» [Arcade] We asked John why he'd included giant lips blowing kisses on many levels. "I think I may have fallen down the stairs and hurt my head," he suggested. "It's not beyond me to do something weird for weird's sake."

» John Newcomer: Designer and artist for *Joust 2*, who also boasts the original *Joust* and *Sinistar* in his bulging back-catalogue.

» Kristina Donofrio: Lead programmer on *Joust 2* and creator of the underrated *Mystic Marathon*.

» Warren Davis: *Joust 2* programmer and best known for his debut game, *Q*Bert*.

John instantly recognised *Joust*'s gameplay would be negatively impacted by moving from the horizontal monitor of the original to a vertical one, but felt he had little choice but to agree to the proposal. Besides, he wanted Williams to regain its former pre-eminence in the coin-op world and as *Joust 2* was to be the only videogame in development, he knew he had to strike the tricky balance between giving players something new and exciting, whilst preserving what had made the original so popular. He kept the fundamental premise of riding giant birds bred for combat but gave the mediaeval aesthetic of the first game something of a metallic makeover.

"I was always a big fan of the artist MC Escher," he says. "The statues coming alive from the background on some of the levels comes from his influence. I almost share a birthday with him but I'm one day off! If only my mom could've pushed me out a bit sooner! But hey, I got Paul McCartney, instead."

John got a little help from his friends by asking artist Jack Haeger to create the graphics for a new mount: the Pegasus. Players could now switch instantly from sitting astride an ostrich to being in the saddle of a mighty flying horse, which opened up new approaches to battling your many enemies. "When I did the original *Joust*, I made a list of everything that could fly," John chuckles. "I pulled out my old list and Pegasus was on it. I thought it would be cool to have a character with pluses and minuses. It's heavier so it falls faster but it's going to win in a collision on the ground. I did all the art for the game except Pegasus because Jack's just a better artist!"

The cast of adversaries was also expanded considerably. Alongside the returning knights on buzzards and that pesky pterodactyl, John added trolls and sea monsters, who lurk beneath the lava and water at the bottom of the screen, ready to grab unsuspecting riders who fly too close to the surface. Colonies of evil, lance-nosed Crystal Bats now populate the caves and have a nasty habit of swarming around you when in a tight spot. Worst of all is Deceptus, a mechanical buzzard, which phases in and out of view at the most inconvenient of times. "Yeah, maybe I made the game too hard," John acknowledges. "It felt like we didn't have much time so the tuning thing, getting feedback from players, that wasn't there. I regret that. Nobody wants to send something out without seeing how other people play it."

» [Arcade] The Pyramid Of Power first appears at level 16 – fly like an Egyptian!

"I WANTED TO MAKE JOUST 2 MORE OF A PUZZLE, SOMETHING TO CHALLENGE YOU AND KEEP YOU WORKING AT THE GAME"
JOHN NEWCOMER

One aspect of the game John is unreservedly happy with is how players can interact with the background on certain levels, notably the brilliantly titled Sir Magix, The Pulveriser, which first appears in round eight. "I'm real proud of that," he beams. "I wanted to give players other reasons to fly around and other targets to hit. There were four spots you had to hit to destroy him, so you were forced to move around and drop down. You had to put yourself in jeopardy. I wanted to do a lot more of that. That was probably my favourite part of the game."

» We witnessed Robert Griffin smash the *Joust 2* world record live at Funspot on 2 June 2006, with a score of 13,012,450. You can read about his incredible skills in issue 54.

VERTICAL DROP

WHY PORTRAIT ORIENTATION DID NOT MAKE FOR A PRETTY PICTURE

"We all could see using a vertical monitor was a problem," says *Joust 2* coder Warren Davis, "and if we could see that, I'm sure players could. No one thought it was a smart move in terms of gameplay but that was the decision that had been made." The reason for the marketing department insisting the sequel moved from the horizontal monitor of the original to a portrait layout was the intention to produce *Joust 2* as a conversion kit – and in 1986, there were far more vertical monitors in arcades, thus increasing the potential market. Yet when the game was almost complete, Williams decided to create a bespoke cabinet for the game after all, alongside a kit. "That always puzzled me considering the directive we'd been given at the start," sighs game designer John Newcomer. "Who knows why they changed their minds. This is why letting the sales department dictate design parameters was a very bad idea. Around 1990, when the design team was pitching sports and fighting games, the sales team was saying we should do a horseshoes game because President Bush played horseshoes at the Whitehouse in his free time. You can't make stuff like this up."

» Kristina poses with an original *Joust 2* cabinet, given to her when she left Williams in 1986.

» [Arcade] John's favourite screen is Sir Magix, The Pulveriser – push his buttons and make him explode.

» [Arcade] No prizes for guessing what birds might await you on level 6.

Of course, as game designer rather than programmer, John had to rely on a coder to turn his vision into on-screen reality and initially, things did not go well. Williams teamed John up with a freelance programmer and after a few months, it was clear he wasn't up to the task. He was dismissed halfway through the project and in his place, two familiar faces were brought on board: Kristina Donofrio and Warren Davis. "Not only did I know them, I liked and trusted them," says John. "The ironic part is I can't remember interacting with them much. I told them what I was after and showed them the characters but then left them alone, pretty much. I'm not gonna tell Warren how to program. The guy's brilliant! And Kristina is very smart and really talented. She's one of those people who never really got their due."

"I was a fixer at Williams," smiles Kristina. "I ended up with the difficult things no one else wanted to do. I have this hyper-focus, like a dog with a bone. *Joust 2* was using the same hardware I had developed for *Mystic Marathon* and [the game] had progressed significantly without me. I came in to tweak it and make sure everything was handled correctly. The way I'd written the operating system was pretty much table-driven, with the animation and the collision points. I had to co-ordinate the audio, too."

The audio included a considerable amount of speech, something Kristina was very comfortable with, having coaxed pinball table *Gorgar* to speak back when she first started at Williams in 1979. Her formidable work ethic and positive working relationship with John – "He dealt with upper management

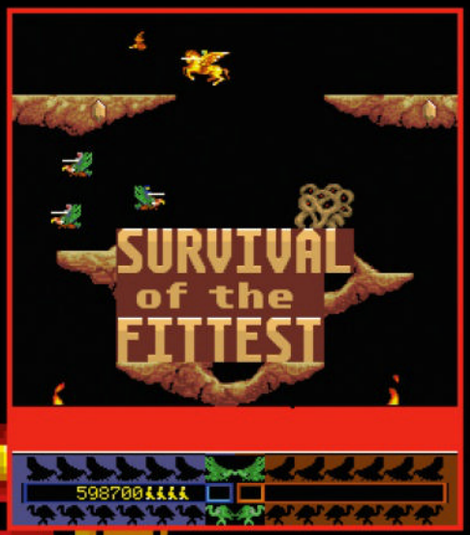
MASTERING JOUST 2

THE PTERODACTYL

"All of the core enemies are smarter and faster than in the original *Joust* but the pterodactyl is especially so. Trying to run away from it is folly as it will follow you, similar to a Baiter in *Defender*. Your best hope is to kill it as soon as it appears."

HATCHED WARRIORS

"Unlike the original game, freshly hatched Warriors are threats if you are in ostrich form, as they now walk back and forth with lance protruding, looking to disembowel you. They cannot harm you in Pegasus form, though, so approach them as a beast rather than a bird."



» [Arcade] *Joust 2*'s subtitle makes it clear – only the strongest will survive.

so I could focus on coding and he didn't bug me, which I really appreciated," she adds – meant the game developed quickly over the subsequent two months, aided by the addition of Warren Davis to the coding team.

"Kristina and I were asked to finish the game and it felt like we were bailing it out," says Warren, who had been recruited by Williams in March, 1986. "We inherited a lot of code we didn't write which is never good, especially if you think it's pretty bad code. And we were forced to use a vertical monitor which we all thought was stupid. You're jousting! You want the horizontal space, the real estate!"

"WE WERE FORCED TO USE A VERTICAL MONITOR WHICH WE ALL THOUGHT WAS STUPID. YOU'RE JOUSTING! YOU WANT THE HORIZONTAL SPACE!"
WARREN DAVIS

With the core gameplay somewhat hampered and a tight deadline to contend with as well, the team should be congratulated on producing a game full of interesting ideas and new features. With 100 levels, including 36 unique screen layouts, the title screen sensibly allowed expert jousters to start at a higher level, earning a bonus for their bravery. The ability to transform from bird to horse spiced things up and the array of foes, both airborne and land based, presented a serious challenge – even newly hatched Warriors now came armed with a lance to disembowel unsuspecting players. Yet despite all it had to offer, *Joust 2* never got close to achieving the success of its forebear.

"Timing is everything," suggests Kristina, when asked why the sequel underperformed. "I watched pinball and videogame markets go up and down over the years. Yeah, *Joust 2* could've done better but I think the market was collapsing. Plus, you want to put a game out on test and see how it plays, then tweak it, and we didn't get to do that. And it was maybe too complicated and, well, a rehash. You can put lipstick on a pig… I mean, I'm not saying it was a pig, but you design and

» [Arcade] The Altar: a wing and a prayer…

build to your budget."
All valid reasons, though revisiting the game now, via emulation or by booting up *Arcade's Greatest Hits: The Midway Collection 2* which appeared in 1997 for the PlayStation, there's much to enjoy in *Joust 2* – especially in co-op mode and with infinite credits. "I've not played it for decades," admits Warren, "but I've had people say to me, 'Oh man, I love *Joust 2*!' and I'm like, 'Really?' Maybe I should play it again…"

He should. And, dear reader, so should you. ★

Thanks to Martyn Carroll for additional help.

HIGH-SCORE TIPS FROM WORLD RECORD HOLDER ROBERT GRIFFIN

GOLDEN EGGS

■ "Look out for Golden Eggs which, when collected, trigger a timer. By stepping on this timer, which is limited in duration to about 13 seconds, you will receive a bonus of 1,000-10,000 points, a Super Zap which kills everything on the screen, or an extra life."

LANCE-NOSED CRYSTAL BATS

■ "Another new enemy, these evil creatures hatch from diamond-shaped eggs or gems embedded in ledges, so watch out for them suddenly coming to life. Although not the toughest enemy in the game, trying to kill the last one can be frustrating."

DECEPTUS, THE MECHANICAL BUZZARD

■ "The worst of all the enemies. Just when you are about to drop on him for the kill, he vanishes, reappearing wherever it is most inconvenient for you on the screen. He will also stay phased out when you are killed and reappear right on top of you. Totally maddening!"

Atari 5200

» **MANUFACTURER:** Atari » **YEAR:** 1982
» **COST:** $269.99 (launch), £100+ (today, boxed), £60+ (today, unboxed)

In theory, the Atari 5200 represented a solid idea for a successor to the venerable 2600. By basing its technology on that of the company's 8-bit home-computer line, Atari could offer clear improvements in graphics and sound without requiring programmers to learn a brand-new system. With four controller ports, a storage bay for two controllers and an automatic RF switch-box, the system was designed to be highly convenient. Of course, the best-laid plans rarely work out. The system's joysticks were a disaster, almost all of the initial games were improved versions of existing Atari software, and Atari 2600 owners felt free to explore other options due to a lack of backwards compatibility.

To compete with the ColecoVision, Atari soon produced a cost-reduced version of the console with two controller ports and introduced an adapter for Atari 2600 cartridges. This didn't end up mattering a great deal due to the games market crashing in North America, and the Atari 5200 was discontinued ahead of the planned introduction of the Atari 7800 in 1984, with over a million units sold. *

Atari 5200 fact

■ No PAL version of the Atari 5200 was ever manufactured, making it the only system in Atari's main console line never to receive a launch in Europe.

PROCESSORS: MOS TECHNOLOGY 6502C 8-BIT CPU (1.79 MHZ
RAM: 16KB
GRAPHICS: ANTIC AND GTIA CHIPS, UP TO 320 PIXELS PER LINE, UP TO 16 COLOURS FROM A PALETTE OF 256, UP TO 8 SPRITES ON SCREEN
AUDIO: POKEY CHIP, FOUR PSG CHANNELS
MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 32KB, EXPANDABLE WITH BANK-SWITCHING)
ROM: 2KB BIOS

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ESSENTIAL GAME

Robotron: 2084

Many of the Atari 5200's best games are arcade conversions, and this is one of the top picks among them. Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar made one of the most-intense arcade shooters ever in *Robotron: 2084*, and Judy Bogart's conversion manages to capture the essence of the arcade original. Though the character movement is a little choppy, the frantic robot-blasting action remains intact – as does the twin-stick arcade control scheme, as Atari released the game with a joystick coupler to allow for a better home experience.

THE WEIRD WORLD OF ATARI 2600 ACCESSORIES

THE STELLAR SUCCESS OF THE ATARI VCS/2600 LED TO AN EXPLOSION OF PERIPHERALS BEING RELEASED FOR THE MACHINE, SOME OF WHICH WERE VERY STRANGE INDEED, ENCOMPASSING EVERYTHING FROM FOAM EXERCISE MATS TO PLASTIC MACHINE GUNS

WORDS BY LEWIS PACKWOOD

If they were shown a picture of it, almost everyone would be able to recognise the Atari 2600's iconic one-button joystick, even if they weren't a particular fan of videogames. The fact that it's not a particularly good controller, with its stiff joystick and sweaty-palm-inducing rubber, is by the by. Its image has almost become a shorthand for the concept of retro gaming itself; in fact, it graces the spine of this very magazine.

By contrast, relatively few people are aware of the various other controllers and unusual accessories released over the Atari 2600's lifetime. "I have found that generally, they go under the radar a bit," says Rees Stephenson, presenter of the Ctrl-Alt-Rees YouTube channel and avid Atari collector (indeed, you can see his impressive Atari assemblage in issue 236's Collector's Corner). Rees notes that original Atari accessories can generally be picked up for a pittance.

Of course, it isn't just joysticks we're talking about. Back when it was launched in 1977, the 2600 (or the VCS as it was known then) came with a pair of paddle controllers in addition to the iconic CX10 joystick, harking back to Atari's history as a purveyor of *Pong* machines. Four of the VCS' nine launch games were played with paddles, although paddle controllers quickly fell out of fashion, and the vast majority of games in the VCS library can only be played with a joystick.

Relatively few third-party peripherals were made for Atari's console in the early days, but that changed at the dawn of the Eighties. The home conversion of the smash-hit arcade game *Space Invaders* in 1980 sent sales of the VCS into the stratosphere, and further killer apps, like *Pac-Man*, helped to compound Atari's success. Other companies took notice and rushed to milk the teats of Atari's cash cow by making games and accessories for the console. At the same time, the VCS's nine-pin controller port became a standard for the emerging industry, being used not only for Atari's 8-bit computer range, but also for rival machines such as the VIC-20 and Commodore 64. Companies like Wico Corporation quickly took advantage by making deluxe joysticks that would work across a range of machines.

But for the purposes of this article, we're more interested in the oddities. Atari itself was responsible for a few of these, like the official Atari Joystick Repair Kit: it's difficult to imagine a console manufacturer encouraging consumers to fix their own controllers nowadays. Atari also released some Remote Control Wireless Joysticks in 1983, which used radio waves to communicate with a base station that plugged into the console. They're huge things, with a base over twice the height of the regular joysticks to accommodate the 9-volt battery underneath, and each had a rather unwieldy aerial attached. At a launch price of around $60, they weren't cheap, and they didn't work particularly well either, with the controls being affected by lag and interference from other devices. Plus they ate through batteries remarkably quickly.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, though. Over the next few pages we'll introduce you to a selection of the stranger Atari 2600 accessories, from wooden joystick holders to exercise mats, and even a keyboard that turns your humble console into a fully fledged computer. And this is by no means an exhaustive list – there are still plenty more oddities out there to discover.

Photo Credits: Ctrl-Alt-Rees, oldcomputers.net, the-liberator.net, atarimania.com, rmcretro.com, Video Game Kraken, Karl Morris, Evan Amos and Friday Night Arcade.

» The iconic CX40 Atari joystick. This replaced the CX10 that was originally bundled with the Atari VCS, and although its innards were altered, it's essentially identical from the outside, except for the word 'TOP' on the base.

» The Atari VCS originally came with paddle controllers in addition to a joystick. The paddles came in pairs that slotted into a single controller port.

HOW TO KEEP THE JOY IN YOUR ATARI JOYSTICK.
INTRODUCING
THE ATARI JOYSTICK REPAIR KIT.
ATARI
REACH FOR THE STARS. REACH FOR ATARI

» Remarkably, Atari released an official Joystick Repair Kit, encouraging consumers to repair the controllers themselves.

» A selection of official Atari peripherals from the collection of Karl Morris, author of *We Love Atari*.

» Atari released these Remote Control Wireless Joysticks in 1983. They looked similar to regular CX40 joysticks, but much deeper and with the addition of an aerial.

THE POWER-STICK/ THE JOYBOARD

AMIGA CORPORATION · 1983

It may surprise you to learn that before it was bought by Commodore in 1984, Amiga Corporation manufactured peripherals for the Atari 2600. Essentially, the peripherals business was a front to hide the company's top-secret work on the 16-bit Amiga chipset, codenamed Lorraine, although getting into the accessories business also helped the fledgling company to open communication channels with retailers and distributors. When the Amiga chipset was finally shown at the January 1984 Consumer Electronics Show, selected business people were escorted past the rows of peripherals at the Amiga booth to a private demonstration.

The Power-Stick was a tiny controller, much smaller than Atari's official joysticks, and it was designed so that it could be played with just one hand, with the player's thumb resting on top of the diminutive stick. In that sense it's similar to the popular Nineties Bug joystick from Cheetah, and by all accounts the Power-Stick was a much more comfortable and responsive controller than Atari's official effort. The addition of two fire buttons also meant it could be used with either your left or right hand, and it had a generous six-foot cable to boot. A version for the Intellivision and ColecoVision was released as well, which had a 12-button keypad bolted onto the front. The Joyboard was an altogether different and more unusual proposition. Launched at $39.95, it was essentially a precursor to the Wii Balance Board, although with nothing like the Nintendo controller's precision. The Joyboard stands on a central pivot and works like a joystick for the feet, with your movements back and forth and side to side being mapped to the four joystick directions. It was bundled with a game called *Mogul Maniac*, which sees you skiing into the screen with the aim of passing between red and blue gates, and Amiga Corporation even got Olympic skier Suzy Chaffee on board to promote it.

Another three games were designed for the Joyboard. One was called *Off Your Rocker*, and only had a very limited distribution. Basically it was a cross between a dance game and Simon Says, with the aim of copying patterns to make a character called Rockin' Rollie boogie on the screen. The second was *Surf's Up*, where the aim was to balance your surfboard on the top of a wave, although it was never released officially; and the final game was *SAC Alert*, where you were tasked with piloting a jet fighter in 3D combat. This was also never released, although a limited number of cartridges were produced for sale in 2010.

Off Your Rocker and *SAC Alert* were developed by Video Soft, the studio set up by Jerry Lawson, who led the team that created the Fairchild Channel F console in 1976. Video Soft made a number of unreleased games for Amiga Corporation, including a series of titles for use with 3D glasses, such as *3D Ghost Attack*. These were originally going to be released alongside the Amiga Power Module, which plugged into the 2600's cartridge port and added another 6K of RAM, as well as allowing the use of cassette tapes and enabling stereoscopic 3D. Intriguingly, Power Modules could also be linked to a modem, and a Video Soft game called *Depth Charge* would have allowed two players to face off against each other down the phone line. But after being announced in early 1983, the Power Module was canned before release.

Perhaps the most intriguing thing about the Joyboard is its link to the Amiga software failure screen. If you've ever wondered why your Amiga 500 flashes up the message 'Guru Meditation' when the computer crashes, it dates back to when the Amiga Corp team joked that they should create a 'Zen meditation game' for the Joyboard where the aim was to sit perfectly still while contemplating the nature of errors in their source code. Eventually, this apocryphal game became a reality: in the mid-Noughties, author and game designer Ian Bogost created an Atari 2600 game called *Guru Meditation* after being inspired by the story, and released a limited batch of ten cartridges with accompanying Joyboards.

1

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1 KEYBOARD CONTROLLER

ATARI · 1978

This device was released in 1978 alongside three compatible games, *Hunt & Score*, *Codebreaker* and *Brain Games*, followed by BASIC Programming in 1979, which was designed by Warren Robinett of *Adventure* fame. This last title required two Keyboard Controllers, which could be slotted together using the grooves at the side, and it came with special keyboard overlays.

Then in 1981 the MagiCard was released by Computer Magic (later renamed CommaVid), which was a circuit board that plugged into the VCS cartridge slot and let you program in machine code. It required two Keyboard Controllers, and the 136-page manual even had instructions for building a cassette interface to allow you to save your creations to tape. However, it was produced in tiny quantities, meaning it's now extremely rare.

2 VIDEO TOUCH PAD

ATARI · 1982

Doug Neubauer's *Star Raiders* was a huge hit for Atari's 8-bit computers in 1979, thanks to its phenomenal 3D space combat, so it made sense to port it to the Atari 2600. The trouble was that *Star Raiders* required a lot of extra buttons for things like turning on shields, so Atari decided to bundle it with a controller it called the Video Touch Pad, which plugged into the second joystick port.

The game came with a keyboard overlay, although it only used five of the pad's 12 buttons. Functionally, the pad is identical to the earlier Keyboard Controller, so it's unclear why Atari decided to develop an all-new peripheral for *Star Raiders* – especially considering the Video Touch Pad wasn't used for any further games.

3 KID'S CONTROLLER

ATARI · 1983

Yet another variation on the Keyboard Controller, but this time it has been made bigger and chunkier, with squishy rubber buttons to make it easy for children to use. A range of *Sesame Street*-themed games were made for use with the peripheral, including *Alpha Beam With Ernie*, *Big Bird's Egg Catch*, *Cookie Monster Munch* and *Oscar's Trash Race*, and colourful overlay cards were included with each. Rees says it's rare to see a Kid's Controller come up for sale. "But they're not particularly expensive when they do, so it's not like rarity makes them particularly valuable."

4 COMPUMATE

SPECTRAVIDEO INTERNATIONAL · 1983

The Spectravideo CompuMate promised to turn your console into a computer, with a keyboard that sat neatly on top of the Atari 2600. The peripheral added 16K of ROM and 2K of RAM, and came with three pre-installed programs: the first was Magic Easel, a drawing program that let you create nine frames of animation on a 40x40 pixel canvas, while the second was Music Composer, a simple synthesiser for making chiptunes.

Perhaps most excitingly, the third program was a stripped-down version of Microsoft BASIC, allowing budding coders to write their very own programs on the 2600. Plus the CompuMate came with an audio jack, so users could plug in a cassette recorder to save their programs.

5 ROMSCANNER COMMAND CENTER

MARJAC · 1983?

The box of the RomScanner Command Center excitedly declares that it "Calls up any of your 10 favourite videogames in less than a second with the touch of a button", the idea being that you can keep your cartridges plugged in at all times rather than going through the hassle of hoisting them in and out of the cartridge slot. It seems like a marginally useful accessory at best, yet the RomScanner is just one of a number of peripherals, including the Videoplexer, Game Selex and Video Game Brain, that all let you swap between multiple cartridges. Still, the fact that these accessories are now so rare perhaps indicates that the market for them was miniscule.

THE WEIRD WORLD OF ATARI 2600 ACCESSORIES

1 XG-1 LIGHT GUN

ATARI · 1987

The XG-1 Light Gun was launched as part of the Atari XE Video Game System, a console/computer hybrid that marked the end of Atari's line of 8-bit computers. The basic version of the XE came with just the console and joystick, but the deluxe version added a keyboard and the lightgun.

Even though it was bundled with the Atari XE, the XG-1 Light Gun was compatible with all of Atari's 8-bit computers, as well as the Atari 7800 and Atari 2600. However, only one 2600-compatible lightgun game was released: *Sentinel*, developed by Imagineering and released in 1990. Another 2600 game, *Shooting Arcade*, was developed by Axlon in 1989 but never came out. The gun was also released in a standalone package in which it was called the G1 Light Gun, with the box depicting a red version of the peripheral and saying it was "for use with 2600 and 7800 systems". However, the gun inside was the same grey one that came with the Atari XE.

The real question is why it took Atari so long to launch a 2600-compatible lightgun, especially since so many earlier dedicated consoles from the Seventies came with them. "It's interesting, because they designed lightgun support into the 2600 in 1977 when it was first released, and then didn't actually release a compatible lightgun for it until 1987," says Rees. Perhaps the XG-1's woeful accuracy explains why Atari wasn't in a hurry: it's actually more of a specialised lightpen than a lightgun, and the aim was perennially off.

2 SPACE AGE JOYSTICK

ATARI · 1983

An advert for the unreleased Milton Bradley HD2000 Heavy Duty Joystick shows that it looks exactly the same as the Space Age Joystick: it appears that Atari struck a deal with Milton Bradley to release the latter firm's peripheral under its own brand. It's also quite similar to the MBX joystick Milton Bradley made for the TI-99/4A computer, although it has fewer buttons.

So why is it Space Age? Perhaps the pistol grip made it look something like a *Star Trek* phaser, ventures Rees. He also can't get over how massive it is. "For me as an adult, it feels quite big, but using it as a kid with small hands, it would have been quite unwieldy. Even the top part is practically the size of a standard Atari joystick."

3 TRAK-BALL

ATARI · 1983

There are two versions of the Trak-Ball. The first, the CX22, came with a white ball and rather flimsy circular buttons, but the later version, the CX80 (pictured here), had a black ball and nifty triangular fire buttons. It works excellently for playing *Missile Command* and *Centipede*, and there's a switch for changing between trackball and joystick mode. "In joystick mode, it just maps it to the four joystick directions," says Rees. "Although I'm not sure whether you'd want to be playing *Pac-Man* by frantically shuffling the trackball around."

4 TRACK & FIELD CONTROLLER

ATARI · 1984

This controller was designed by Wico for Atari, which had secured the rights from Konami to release the hit arcade game *Track & Field* for the 2600, just in time for the 1984 Summer Olympics. The controller was bundled with the game, and exactly replicated the arcade controls, making it a much better way to play *Track & Field* than by manically waggling a stick. "It's so much easier, and obviously means you don't end up destroying all of your joysticks," says Rees.

5 STICK STATION

SKYWRITER · 1983?

Yes, it's a three-pound plank of wood with a hole in it. And it could have been yours for the low, low price of $14.95! Best of all, you could choose from a poplar or walnut finish.

The Stick Station certainly feels like it was on the more cash-grabby end of the explosion in Atari accessories, but remarkably, there were quite a few similar joystick stands around. The Grand Stand Company produced an elaborate wooden "joystick stabiliser support and score enhancer" that looked something like a lectern, while several other obscure companies churned out joystick holders in wood or plastic that would either sit on your lap or on a table.

6 COSMIC COMMANDER CONTROL

MILTON BRADLEY · 1983

According to the 1983 Sears Christmas catalogue, the Cosmic Commander Control cost $39.99 and required two D batteries, which were to power the lights and vibrations that activated every time you pressed the fire button. Yes, that's right, Milton Bradley introduced a rumble feature a good 14 years before the PlayStation DualShock controller and N64 Rumble Pak. The Cosmic Commander Control was bundled with the game *Survival Run*, which saw you flying through 3D subterranean caverns and shooting down aliens by aligning them with the on-screen crosshairs.

7 FLIGHT COMMANDER CONTROL

MILTON BRADLEY · 1983

The Flight Commander Control cost the same as the Cosmic Commander Control and had the same light and vibration functions, but was styled after a pilot's machine gun rather than a spaceship control panel. It came with the game *Spitfire Attack*, which saw you flying into the screen and shooting down enemy planes by lining them up in your crosshairs. A third Milton Bradley controller, the Armored Commander Control, was planned and would have come with the game *Tank Blitz*, but it was never released.

FOOT CRAZ ACTIVITY PAD

EXUS CORPORATION · 1983

Billed as part of Exus' Family Fun & Fitness system, the Foot Craz Activity Pad was developed by "Exus Corporation, the revolutionary high-technology company based in California's world-famous Silicon Valley", as the instruction manual tells us. It's essentially a precursor to Bandai's 1986 NES Power Pad (known as Family Trainer in Japan), which was a mat with pressure sensors embedded in a layer of flexible plastic. Later, the concept would be recycled again for the various dance mats released with console versions of games like *Dance Dance Revolution*.

The Foot Craz is a foam cushion pad measuring 30x24-inches, and at 1-inch thick, it's much bulkier than later dance mats. The five coloured buttons on the pad map to the four joystick directions and the fire button, meaning you could potentially play any game with the Foot Craz, if you fancy the challenge of playing *Yars' Revenge* with your feet. The peripheral came bundled with two games, *Video Jogger* and *Video Reflex*, and seems to have been sold at $69, according to a 1984 article in the magazine *House Beautiful*. *Video Jogger* presents two oval tracks on the screen, with a pace symbol circling around each one, and the idea is to keep your jogger character level with the pace symbol as it moves around the track. You jog on the orange and blue buttons, but can press the yellow button to switch from the upper, slower track to the lower, faster track at any time, then press the red button to switch back. *Video Reflex*, meanwhile, presents you with five on-screen squares that correspond to the five Foot Craz buttons, and the idea is to stomp any bugs that appear in the squares by stamping on the correct button – but if you accidentally stamp on a butterfly, you lose a life. ✱

Jogger & Reflex
TWO CHALLENGING VIDEO PROGRAMS
HOME BECOMES A PRIVATE GYM EXUS, the high-technology company, has added a captivating new dimension to home fitness and health with the introduction of Jogger and Reflex, exciting exercise programs that interact with TV, using the Atari 2600/VCS.
exus BRINGS FITNESS HOME

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Fatal Fury

» **PLATFORM:** NEO GEO » **RELEASED:** 1991 » **DEVELOPER:** SNK

So far, the combatants of *Fatal Fury* have been pretty fearsome types. There are the main characters – Terry's got street-fighting savvy, Andy has ninja skills and Joe's got his kickboxing. Then there are your opponents, like obvious Mike Tyson homage Michael Max, and the bizarre dance-inspired fighting style of Duck King. None of them would look particularly out of place in a standard martial arts film, and the difficulty of the game certainly backs up their toughness.

Then there's Tung Fu Rue, a diminutive old man who looks more like he's ready for a nice cup of tea and some *Bargain Hunt* than a good scrap in the rain. But that's why you shouldn't judge a book by its cover, as Tung soon undergoes some rapid muscular growth that leaves him looking like he's about to enter the Arnold Classic. Forget collecting a pension, this guy's about to collect your name – after he kicks your ass, of course.

BIO

After creating *Street Fighter*, Takashi Nishiyama moved to Capcom's cross-town rival SNK and directed a spiritual successor. Unlike *Street Fighter*, *Fatal Fury* would offer a choice of playable characters and had a strong emphasis on plot for the time. The game became one of the strongest alternatives to Capcom's juggernaut *Street Fighter II*, finding its way to home platforms soon after launch, and alongside *Art Of Fighting* and *Samurai Shodown* it established SNK as a major force in the fighting genre for decades to come.

MORE CLASSIC FATAL FURY MOMENTS

Hanging Out

Many of the *Fatal Fury* fighters have some unexpected tricks to hand, and Richard Meyer is no exception. If you think you can catch him with Terry's Power Wave move, think again – he can hang from the overhead railing in his stage to avoid the projectile attack.

Game In A Game

Everyone loves a good button-bashing bonus game, and *Fatal Fury* adds a meta level to it by presenting you with a virtual arm-wrestling machine – complete with Neo Geo branding, of course. These appear after every couple of matches, and offer you the chance to earn some extra points.

Man Mountain

Neo Geo games often had enormous sprites, and the resident monster of *Fatal Fury* is the villainous pro wrestler Raiden. You'll meet the massive fighter fairly late on your journey through the game, and he's a tough nut to crack, capable of lifting a fully grown man clean off the floor with one arm.

Final Fall

Fatal Fury concludes in a dramatic and memorable fashion befitting a tale of murder and revenge. Having battled to the top of Geese Howard's tower, victory sees your fighter kicking the crime boss off the side of the building, causing him to plummet to his untimely and well-deserved demise.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

GAME OVER

IT'S THE SPANISH-MADE GAME THAT CAUSED A COLOSSAL – AND HYPOCRITICAL – STIR IN THE UK THANKS TO ITS CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN. JOIN RETRO GAMER AS WE LOOK BACK AT THE 8-BIT RUN-AND-GUN GAME THAT CEMENTED DEVELOPER DINAMIC'S REPUTATION – FOR BETTER OR WORSE

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC fans in particular will know the name Dinamic well. They'll remember the pretty graphics. The impressive presentation. And, of course, the rock-hard, interminable gameplay that made you want to throw the cassette on the floor and stomp it into a million pieces. The Spanish software house, revered in its home country, seemed to revel in producing exceptionally tough computer games. Colourful yet attribute clash-ridden, vague collision detection and a habit of sending you *right back to the start* when you lost a life; these were all Dinamic calling cards.

Following moderate success with arcade clone *West Bank* and platformer *Abu Simbel Profanation* at Sheffield software house Gremlin Graphics, Dinamic shifted to the UK's biggest games company for its 1986 release *Army Moves*. Published under Ocean's Imagine label, the reception to *Army Moves* in the press would soon become familiar. "The first six levels are much too hard," grimaced *Crash* reviewer Ben Stone, "so one gets increasingly frustrated." The theme continued into *Navy Moves*, a game that houses an opening level so perversely tricky it's a wonder that any of the game's cassettes remain intact.

In between these military-based adventures, Dinamic decided to try its hand at a sci-fi game. In a very distant galaxy, Queen Gremla rules with an iron fist. Aided by her faithful lieutenant, the warrior Arkos, Gremla's forces, giant robots, orcs and flying guardians keep the queen in power throughout her realm, punishing those who dare to challenge her. But the threat to Gremla comes from a much-closer source: disenfranchised and appalled by her corruption, Arkos has had enough and vows to take down his erstwhile boss. Inevitably, this is where you come in. Across two of the galaxy's worlds, the player battles Gremla's army as Arkos begins his hazardous mission to dismantle her terrible empire.

MINE

ARKOS

BARREL

POW UP

POW UP ICON

"I HAD A COPY OF THE AMSTRAD VERSION AND MADE MY BEST GUESS ON HOW IT ALL WORKED UNDER THE HOOD"

JAMES HIGGINS

BOMB

EYEBALL

» [ZX Spectrum] Dinamic had a particular method for dealing with the Spectrum's attribute clash: it just ignored it.

DEVELOPER Q&A

RETRO GAMER TALKS TO JAMES HIGGINS REGARDING HIS WORK ON THE THOMSON PORT OF GAME OVER

WAS GAME OVER YOUR FIRST GAME AT OCEAN SOFTWARE?
No, my first job was porting *Green Beret* to the Thomson MO5/TO7-70 and TO9. Then I did *Arkanoid, Yie Ar Kung Fu II*, and then *Game Over* and *Game Over II*.

WERE YOU AT ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE THOMSON COMPUTER?
I'd never heard of it! I called up [Ocean] hoping to get a job. I spoke to Gary [Bracey, Ocean's software manager] who became very interested when I mentioned I could code 6809 processor – I had a Dragon 32 computer. Gary had a need for a 6809 coder; I took the train down to Manchester and pretty much said, "No problem." I was left with an MO5 and got cracking.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT CREATING GAME OVER?
I had a copy of the Amstrad version and made my best guess on how it all worked under the hood. There was no source code or art supplied.

I may have gotten some reference materials or layouts, but I don't recall.

DID YOU ENCOUNTER MANY ISSUES?
The biggest problem was that the game was so bloody hard! It took a lot of playing to get through it, and I enlisted the help of my brother Tom to make notes as I played. The other – painful – memory I have is that the art package I had on the Thomson was driven by a light pen, and my arm used to ache horribly after making some art.

ANY TECHNICAL PROBLEMS?
The toughest challenge with any game on the Thomson was that it was very much like the Spectrum, with a mono bitmap and an attribute map with colours. Unlike the Spectrum, the attribute map was the same size as the bitmap – effective 8x1 attributes instead of 8x8. This meant you had to effectively draw the whole screen twice if you wanted it to update colours. Slow.

WERE YOU AWARE OF THE CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN?
I remember it well, 'nipplegate'. It was really hard to see what the fuss was about, then or now, especially in the UK, where nipples were plastered all over our daily 'newspapers'.

WHAT ARE YOUR FINAL THOUGHTS ON GAME OVER AND YOUR THOMSON VERSION?
For the time, it was a decent game, but not especially groundbreaking. I think my Thomson version was a reasonable interpretation considering it was done without source code or assets. Of course, this was before the advent of side-by-side video comparisons. I should also add that all the Thomson's documentation was in French; fortunately, I was able to discern most of the functionality from the tech documents. Oh, and I still blame my 'hunt and peck' approach to typing on its 'AZERTY' keyboard – 'auite' horrible really!

Our thanks to James for his time.

CONVERSION CAPERS

RETRO GAMER TAKES A LOOK AT GAME OVER ON EACH OF ITS FORMATS

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Dinamic's trademark attribute clash is ever-present in the Spectrum version of *Game Over* as Arkos charges across each world. Highly responsive controls and some fast shooting action ensure it plays a lot better than it looks, although it's a shame about the harsh restart points.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ The Amstrad game is full of vibrant colours and plays reasonably well. While the respawning issue is still present, the controls are tight, and the pace of the game is notably slower, which for once, suits the gameplay. That laser-fire sound effect can get a tad annoying, however.

C64

■ The C64 loading screen tackles *that* problem by zooming the view in. Unfortunately, things don't improve in-game, with an ill-judged jump mechanic resulting in frequent deaths and a frustrating trawl back to the start. A shame, as it looks good and has a great Martin Galway tune.

In terms of gameplay, the template of *Game Over* is comparable to the on-foot sections of the *Moves* games. Arkos is a nimble fellow, able to jump, crouch and run across each screen, and his quest begins within a dark prison building on the planet of Hypsis. Once he has escaped from here, Arkos travels across the verdant world as the forces of Gremla attempt to destroy him. Hypsis is an incongruous world: snow-capped mountains and tall, thin trees form the backdrop to a chaotic battle as green, muscular orcs and jet fighters home in on the player, many of its screens swelled with mechanical platforms and robust ladders.

» [ZX Spectrum] Spectrum owners got the full glory of Queen Gremla while they waited for *Game Over* to load.

"THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WAS THAT THE GAME WAS SO BLOODY HARD!"
JAMES HIGGINS

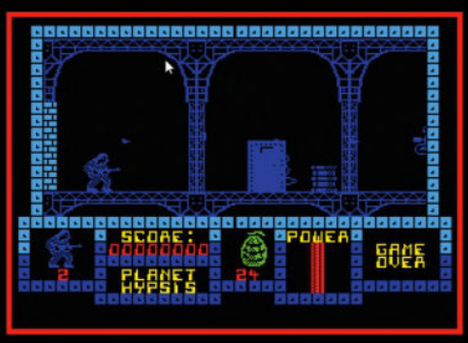
Arkos's laser gun has infinite ammunition, and his backpack contains a limited cache of powerful grenades. Throughout the first world of Hypsis sits a range of large red barrels; shoot each of these three times, and it reveals a bonus item. The rectangular boxes and hearts boost Arkos's grenade tally and energy, respectively; the Field Of Force makes Arkos temporarily immune; Pow Up boosts his shooting power and lengthens his grenade range; and finally, watch out for the spiky mine as it kills Arkos instantly. You'll need all these bonuses and more in *Game Over*. Countless enemies incessantly respawn, a never-ending barrage of death from the desperate Queen Gremla. Guardian robots patrol the prison (seemingly flying using canoes), giving way to the large green orcs that inhabit the planet of Hypsis. Negotiate past ten screens of these, and it's time to take on the mid-level boss.

» [ZX Spectrum] Arkos begins the second part of his mission on the planet Sckunn.

While *Game Over*'s boss fights are not its chief claim to fame (we'll come to that shortly), they are nonetheless impressive. After battling across half of Hypsis, Arkos comes face-to-ugly-face with the Giant Orko. This huge behemoth belies its size, bouncing merrily across the screen as it attempts to squish the poor player. Together with its missiles, Orko is a formidable opponent, taking a mammoth 40 hits to kill – you saved up those grenades, right? Once dispatched, Arkos continues his journey before reaching the final boss, or rather bosses, on screen 19.

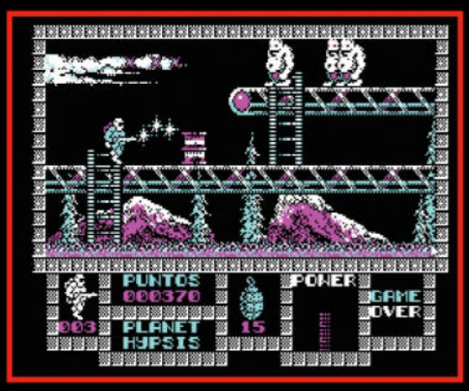
MSX

One hundred million kudos points to the MSX programmer of *Game Over* – finally, upon losing a life, Arkos returns to the start of the current screen! The question begs, if the person behind this version (according to the title screen "P Sudon") could do this, why didn't the others?



THOMSON

While it retains much of the spirit of *Game Over*, this Thomson port suffers terribly in the graphics and gameplay departments. Arkos chugs across each screen like an arthritic pensioner, and while some of the platform jumping is notably easier, it's comfortably the poorest of all the versions.



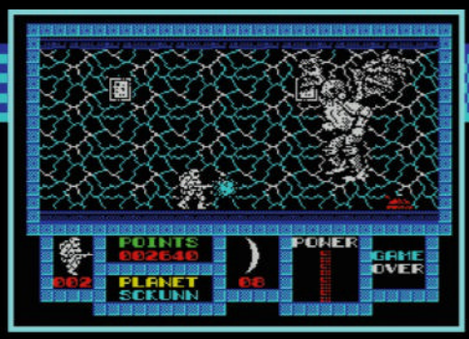
PC

The mysterious P Sudon returns for the PC version of *Game Over*, and it's a commendable effort once more. Unfortunately, there's a lack of colour, but it plays well – jumping is more controlled and much faster than in the MSX game. Overall, a considered and professional conversion.

NIPPLE GATE

HOW ONE TINY SLICE OF THE FEMALE ANATOMY CAUSED AN ALMIGHTY FUSS

When Ocean released *Game Over*, the software house used the same artwork from the Spanish release, a glorious painting from the talented Luis Royo. While this passed virtually unnoticed in Spain, the same could not be said here in the UK. "While people are striving to make women safer on the streets, it's things like this that wipe it all out," screamed one offended *Computer & Video Games* reader. The reaction, by press and Ocean, was to cover up the offending piece of the female anatomy using either a screenshot or artistically, with Newsfield's Oliver Frey adding further metalwork to Queen Gremla's chest. Naturally, the resultant fuss just led to more people seeking out the offending advert, and that wasn't hard to do if you read *Your Sinclair*. Having awarded *Game Over* Mega Game status, the anarchic Speccy magazine printed the advert in its original form and gave away an A5 poster for readers to proudly display on their bedroom walls. The final ironies to this 8-bit storm in a teacup? The image wasn't even original, having already appeared on the cover of *Heavy Metal* magazine, and there was far more of the female form on page three of many tabloid newspapers.



» [ZX Spectrum] Arkos finally faces his former boss, evil Queen Gremla.

▶ Three enormous robots stand in front of Arkos. Each takes 20 shots apiece to eliminate, and, like the Giant Orko, they like nothing better than trampling on rebellious former employees of Queen Gremla.

While Arkos proceeds linearly across Hypsis, the second world of Sckunn is a different proposition. Initially, however, it plays the same: Arkos runs to the right through each screen, this time accosted by giant kangaroo creatures known as Kaikas. These forested wilds give way to a mechanical palace, complete with flying demons and smaller versions of the robots from the end of Hypsis. Lifts take Arkos up and down this building, but he must avoid mines and wall-mounted laser cannons. Once he has solved the mystery of this area, Arkos heads back outside and drops into the secret underground lair of Gremla herself. Here, the flying queen assaults her former adjutant until nothing but her head remains. With his mission accomplished, Arkos' colleagues at the Sidereal Army arrive, and a new era of peace begins in the galaxy.

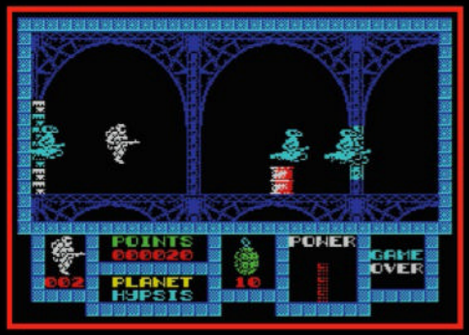
> "FOR THE TIME, IT WAS A DECENT GAME, BUT NOT ESPECIALLY GROUNDBREAKING"
> JAMES HIGGINS

***Game Over* arrived in the summer of 1987 to mixed reviews in the games press.** ZX Spectrum magazine *Crash* gave it a lukewarm reception, comparing it unfavourably to its fellow Imagine title, *Green Beret*. The theme continued with *Zzap!64* (68%) and *Sinclair User* (5/10), with the latter's reviewer, Tamara Howard, calling its packaging "tasteless". Bucking the trend was *Your Sinclair*, its glowing review yielding a nine out of ten score and a free poster to boot. While this no doubt thrilled the target demographic of teenage boys, others were unhappy, causing Ocean to issue adapted versions of its artwork [see Nipplegate boxout]. And, of course, the *Your Sinclair* poster replicated the original *Game Over* advert in all its glory. The cheeky scamps.

The fuss over *Game Over*'s artwork overshadowed Dinamic's attempt to create a smoother, less frustrating gaming experience. However, on the back of the controversy, sales were decent, so when Dinamic offered Ocean another game, *Phantis*, it repurposed it into a sequel to *Game Over*. In *Game Over II*, relatives of the vanquished queen have kidnapped Arkos. Enter the Sidereal Infantry Army hero, Major Locke, embarking on another one-person mission against all odds. *Game Over II* was released just over a year later in the UK, and once more, the buxom queen (actually, her daughter) takes centre stage on the cover. This time, however, to the relief of indignant parents, she's covered up. Just about. ✱

MASTERING GAME OVER

HOW TO AVOID GAME OVER IN GAME OVER

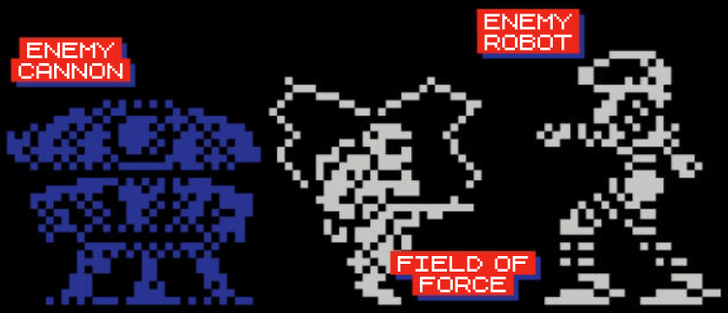


MASTER ARKOS

Arkos is an agile fellow able to jump long distances and run swiftly across each screen. But while it may be tempting to rush, he'll last much longer if you take your time across each area, assessing where the danger comes from.

OVER A BARREL

These red barrels pepper the first world, and shooting them reveals a useful power-up – or a life-destroying bomb. They can be a pain, absorbing Arkos' fire while enemies close in, so it's best to get rid of them ASAP.



» [ZX Spectrum] Arkos explores the queen's palace on Sckunn.

» [ZX Spectrum] Incongruous metallic platforms mix with the rustic landscape on Hypsis.

» [ZX Spectrum] *Game Over*'s impressive mid-level boss, the Giant Orko.

MIND THE GAP

■ Throughout *Game Over*'s two worlds, gaps appear in the floor, chasms of instant death for its protagonist. Sometimes Arkos even has to endure a leap of faith, jumping into the next screen and over a gaping hole, easier said than done with *Game Over*'s never-ending enemies.

DUCK AND NO COVER

■ These robots feature incessantly in part two of *Game Over* and take several shots to kill. Fortunately, their own bullets can be avoided by simply ducking, and Arkos can still fire his weapon from this position – just don't let them stomp on you!

HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW THAT?

■ Ah, Eighties gaming, 50% skill, 50% luck and guesswork. These Viking-style statues are all over *Game Over*'s second world. Arkos can only shoot the one in the top right here, enabling him to pass the eyeball above to enter Gremla's underground lair. Got that? No, us neither.

Shadow Dancer: The Secret Of Shinobi

SAME NAME, DIFFERENT GAME

RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1990 » SEGA R&D2

I never really enjoyed Sega's arcade sequel to *Shinobi*. While it was quite similar mechanically I couldn't really get on with its canine sidekick and I didn't really like its real-life locations and aesthetic style. All said, it left me quite underwhelmed.

Needless to say *Shadow Dancer* wasn't even on my radar when the Mega Drive came out and if it wasn't for the fact that I saw it running on a visit to the Video Game Centre I'd have probably missed it entirely.

I'm glad I did discover it though, as *Shadow Dancer* on the Mega Drive is a darn sight better than its arcade counterpart and is essentially a completely different game. Sure many of the enemies are familiar and the ability to sic your dog on your opponents is still present and correct, but the levels are vastly different.

Where the original game starts off in a crowded airport, the Mega Drive version moves the fighting to a war-torn cityscape where pillars of flame belch forth from manhole covers, while the very ground itself cracks apart the further you and your canine friend progress.

These changes extend to later levels, bosses fights and even *Shadow Dancer*'s minigame, which still sees your ninja using his shurikens to take out as many enemies as possible, but completely changes the perspective so that you're now diving downwards and taking out enemy ninjas as they leap towards you.

While it lacks the dramatic boss encounters and excellent music of Sega's earlier Mega Drive hit, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*, *Shadow Dancer*'s quicker pace and interesting mechanics makes it the perfect console sequel (at least until *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master* came along). Oh, and if you want to see just how different it is to the coin-op original for yourself, it's easily available as part of the *Sega Mega Drive Classics Collection*.

ULTIMATE GUIDE

ZOOL

YOU COULDN'T ESCAPE PLATFORMERS IN THE EARLY NINETIES WITH EVERY DEVELOPER AND ITS ANTHROPOMORPHIC DOG RELEASING ONE. GREMLIN GRAPHICS WAS NO EXCEPTION AND BROUGHT ITS OWN BRAND OF PLATFORMING TO AMIGAS IN THE FORM OF A TWIRLING, STAR-THROWING NINJA

WORDS BY FAITH JOHNSON

» [Amiga] Every stage contains super bonus points in the form of giant items.

***Zool* is a side-scrolling platform game designed by George Allan, who was working at Gremlin Graphics when the Amiga needed a platforming mascot to rival its console competitors.** *Zool* was seen by some as the Amiga's answer to *Sonic The Hedgehog* and Gremlin Graphics' marketing made no secret of this. In the run-up to its October 1992 release, full-page adverts declaring that it's "bad news for hedgehogs" were mixed in with Amiga magazines confirming Zool would dethrone Sonic. None of this hyperbole would come true for Gremlin Graphics and its own brand of anthropomorphic hero. However, *Zool* did far better than most of *Sonic*'s challengers by providing a unique blend of platforming, exploring and action. It was also successful enough to get a sequel and was eventually ported to almost every gaming machine by the mid-Nineties.

Zool's character is a gremlin that's trained in martial arts as well as ninja techniques. He resides in the Nth Dimension and even though *Zool*'s story is similar to many other platform titles from the era, there are some nuances that help it stand out. A four-page comic book at the start of the manual explains that Zool was on his way home when a strange phenomenon appeared. Being an Intergalactic Ninja, his sacred code compels him to investigate further but his ship is suddenly sucked into a planet's atmosphere. Once he wakes up from the crash, Zool discovers that he has been brought to this strange world to complete six dangerous challenges before being able to return to the Nth Dimension and be reunited with his girlfriend.

The planet Zool finds himself on has six worlds each split into three different levels that end in a tough boss encounter. Each unique world has a theme such as food, music or toys, with the most famous being the Chupa Chups-branded Sweet ▶

"WE'VE DONE IT TO PROVIDE THESE STUDENTS WITH A REAL EXPERIENCE OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AS THEY WORK TOWARDS THEIR APPRENTICESHIP QUALIFICATION"
JAKE HABGOOD

» [Amiga] Zool has an *Inception* moment by controlling himself in this arcade minigame.

» [Amiga] You'll need to wait for balloons to appear before going for an air ride.

CONVERSION CAPERS

COMPUTERS, CONSOLES AND HANDHELDS, ZOOL GOES ANYWHERE

GAME GEAR

Beyond the scaled-down graphics and sound, the most notable difference in the Game Gear port is Zool's ability to climb up and down walls. This makes the overall game a little easier as you are now able to line up jumps to higher platforms.

MEGA DRIVE

The Mega Drive port contains an extra world set on a desert island but lacks the bonus rounds of the Amiga version. It also makes good use of parallax scrolling to create multiple background planes and the gameplay is smoother as well as faster.

GAME BOY

Zool on the Game Boy is impressive given the hardware limitations with the only real concessions being simpler level layouts and the lack of speed when running. There are only four sets of levels while the attack patterns of bosses are reduced to just a few movements.

ACORN ARCHIMEDES

Out of all the computer ports, The Acorn Archimedes version is closest to the Amiga original. It faithfully recreates each level and the fast-paced gameplay has remained intact. The audio effects and music sound identical and the colours are just as vibrant.

SUPER NINTENDO

In the Super Nintendo port, levels and bosses have been rearranged with the Music World being the final stage. The graphics have been zoomed in slightly compared to the Mega Drive version but there is more detail in the foreground and the layered backgrounds remain.

AMIGA CD32

You would be forgiven for thinking the CD32 version of *Zool* was a straight port from the Amiga. However, the inclusion of FMV sequences, improved controls, an extra world to play and a new Red Book audio soundtrack makes this a better offering overall.

MS-DOS

The MS-DOS port gets close to the original but falls down due to its squashed graphics, beeping audio and controls that feel sluggish. There are also issues with the scrolling when the screen is busy but it does a good job at maintaining the speed.

ATARI ST

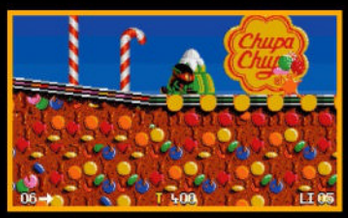
There was always going to be one port that struggled with the fast pace and barrage of colour that is *Zool*. The Atari ST port is decent in places but stuttering scrolling, a reduced colour palette and unresponsive controls make this one to avoid.

MASTER SYSTEM

As well as the added wall climb from the Game Gear version, the Master System port has a different mix of levels and bosses. There are also fewer enemies on the screen and more hearts to refill your health. These changes make the overall difficulty more forgiving.

THE NTH DIMENSION

MEET THE DIFFERENT WORLDS THAT ZOOL MUST SAVE



SWEET WORLD

The Sweet World is filled to the brim with sugary treats and lollipops that can be cracked open to find bonus points. In the European and Japanese versions, the Chupa Chups logo can be seen throughout the level but was excluded from the US version.

MUSIC WORLD

In the Music World you're faced with a tricky puzzle that requires you to play a giant keyboard to complete the level. This world also includes two of the bonus shooter levels hidden behind secret entrances and speakers that can be destroyed for bonus points.

FRUIT WORLD

Even a ninja needs his fruit and vegetables to keep his strength up and you will find plenty of healthy snacks while exploring Fruit World. Fruit cans, used as springs, propel you to higher platforms and there are numerous secret rooms that contain handy bonus points.

TOOL WORLD

This world has many dangers, from nail spikes to chopping buzz saws, as well as fast-moving platforms that fall away when you contact them. Luckily, most of the bonus points are in large clumps and it's easy to locate the entrance to another bonus round.

[Amiga] Collecting enough items opens the level exits and they often appear clumped together.

World. All the main levels have the same basic platform gameplay that requires precise jumps alongside item collection and exploration. To finish a level, Zool must collect enough items to uncover the exit with the number of items needed depending on the difficulty selected at the start of the game. Once enough items are found, the compass in the bottom left of the screen stops spinning and points towards the exit.

During the levels, enemies will respawn after you leave the area. So, retracing your steps will mean having to take them on again and risk damage. Because of this, it's a good idea to take your time and plan your next move rather than keep sprinting ahead at a breakneck speed. Doing so usually means flying past a bunch of items needed to progress. This tactic of slowing down also helps to uncover the various secrets spread throughout the game. Among these secrets are four secret shooting levels found through invisible entrances. This change of pace helps break up the gameplay and gives a brief chance to control Zool's ship while shooting down enemies and collecting bonus points.

Zool only has three hit points per life and although these can be replenished by the scarce hearts dropped by defeated enemies,

TOY WORLD

You would have thought the Toy World was a happy place but robots and tanks are stopping your playtime. You also face danger from the blocks as the blue and orange ones dish out damage. This world also contains the entrance to the final bonus round.

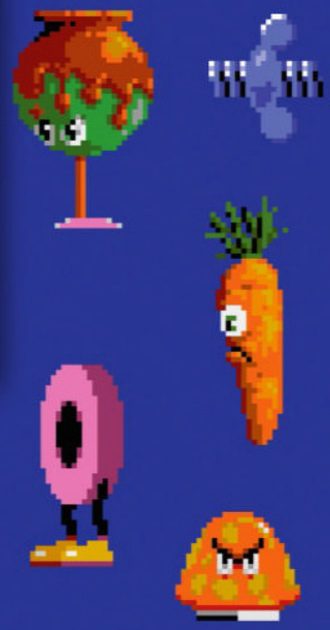
FAIRGROUND WORLD

In the final set of levels, the Fairground World is more scary-movie clown than all the fun of the fair. You'll need precision platforming to traverse the trapeze-like level design and have patience in finding balloons that hoist you up to higher platforms.

BONUS ROUND

Zool has four bonus rounds that are accessed by exploring levels or working out puzzles to uncover the secret entrances. During these shoot-'em-up minigames, you control Zool's spaceship and zap enemies. You'll also have to avoid obstacles while collecting bonus points and health.

"I WROTE THE AMIGA VERSION OF ZOOL BACK IN THE EARLY NINETIES SO IT'S BEEN TRULY AMAZING TO HAVE HELPED A NEW GENERATION OF PROGRAMMERS ON THE REMAKE"
GEORGE ALLAN



it only takes one mistake for your health to be depleted in a matter of moments. The barrage of enemies, spikes and tough platform jumps rarely relents in *Zool*. Luckily, there are restart points that are activated by shooting a ninja star and these become invaluable due to the game's high difficulty. However, these much-needed checkpoints aren't always easy to see and each world's version of them has a different look.

There is a lot to do within each level when considering the constantly depleting time limit and having to collect enough items before any tricky platforming section to find the exit. Luckily, Zool has an array of moves that make him perfect for the challenge. Along with the standard jump, he can twirl in mid-air and this not only acts as an attack, but it also propels Zool forward providing some extra reach. This technique must be perfected for the later levels when the platforms get further apart and the enemies take up more offensive positions. The twirl manoeuvre also makes Zool invulnerable for a short moment so it can be used as a way to escape an area that is overrun by enemies.

Zool can jump on enemy's heads and throws ninja stars in short bursts either on the ground or while jumping and twirling. The ninja stars are the only attack Zool has against the bosses and can be thrown in either direction with a well-timed waggle of the joystick. Zool also grips onto walls and this mechanic is a heavily used feature throughout and needs to be mastered almost as much as the twirl. Most of the levels will require you to jump from wall to wall to get to the higher reaches where the biggest clumps of crucial items lay in wait. The wall mechanic would go on to be improved upon in the console and handheld ports by giving Zool the ability to climb up

» [Amiga] The Chupa Chups product placement is everywhere in the first set of levels.

ZOOL NINJA TEACHER

JAKE HABGOOD AND GEORGE ALLAN EXPLAIN THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND ZOOL REDIMENSIONED

Students at The Sumo Digital Academy remastered *Zool* for Steam in 2021 under the title *Zool Redimensioned*. Now the latest class is porting it to Sony's PlayStation 4. We find out about the project and what it means to the developers of tomorrow.

What is the Sumo Digital Academy?

JAKE: It is a talent development programme creating new pathways into the games industry. We work with universities and even some schools, but our main initiative is the Game Programming Apprenticeship Programme, which is the first of its kind in the UK.

Why are students porting *Zool Redimensioned* to the PlayStation 4?

JAKE: We've done it to provide these students with a real experience of product development as they work towards their apprenticeship qualification. All the code, including the game engine, was completely written by students allowing them to gain their programming 'wings' and release their first product. We also happen to have George Allan, the original programmer, working with us as an academy trainer on the apprenticeship.

GEORGE: I wrote the Amiga version of *Zool* back in the early Nineties so it's been truly amazing (and just a tad surreal) to have helped a new generation of programmers on the remake. The original game was written for a different time and audience. The student teams have done such a fantastic job of making it relevant to a new audience though.

What do the students learn from porting a game to a different system?

JAKE: The PS4 port was originally started by Pete Dawson from the original Steam release, but he didn't have time to finish it before he graduated, so we worked with some students from Sheffield Hallam University to get the main systems up and running. Pete is now a full-time programmer working on one of Sumo's AAA titles and a couple of the Hallam students went on to have placements at Sumo, so I think they got a lot out of the experience.

What is the best part about helping young game designers take their first steps?

JAKE: It's all about passing on a passion for C++ coding. I think many university students still don't realise how important a skill it is for gaining employment as a game programmer, so it's been great to help them focus on developing the right skills for their future careers.

GEORGE: Although they're not technically designers, I do think all of us coders have some design aspirations, so it's been great to see them all work as a team to create a bunch of new content and features. I just wish they'd let me win at the party games occasionally!

GEORGE ALLAN

JAKE HABGOOD

and down. This improves the controls immensely and also makes these ports much easier to complete compared to the computer versions lacking the climb.

Zool's final move is a forward slide that also acts as an attack. This quick floor dash is most useful during some of the boss fights as you can duck under swooping attacks while escaping to a corner. It can also be used to slide down slopes and take out multiple enemies. During normal gameplay, Zool will also come across many springs, balloons and rails that he uses to gain higher ground and avoid spike pits or other obstacles. These short setpieces are more than just fun gimmicks, they test your platforming skills and often open up hidden areas filled with much-needed items.

To complement Zool's moves and weapons there are several power-ups at his disposal. They usually only appear sparingly and tend to be out of reach, requiring a tough platforming section to acquire. It's worth it to get items like the bomb that instantly clears the screen of enemies, or a clock that will reset your ever-depleting time counter. The shield grants invulnerability for a few vital seconds while the jump power-up gives higher leaps for a short

"THE ORIGINAL GAME WAS WRITTEN FOR A DIFFERENT TIME AND AUDIENCE. THE STUDENT TEAMS HAVE DONE SUCH A FANTASTIC JOB OF MAKING IT RELEVANT TO A NEW AUDIENCE THOUGH"
GEORGE ALLAN

» [Amiga] You can't kill these giant insects so just jump over them to avoid damage.

period of time. There is, of course, the traditional platforming 1-up, but the most interesting power-up is the Twozool. This causes Zool to split into two for a short time with the newly created shadow mimicking each manoeuvre whether that be jumping, attacking or twirling.

Zool certainly went beyond what was expected of a so-called *Sonic* clone, instead of just copying jumping and running around at speed, there is added gameplay depth. Every aspect was carefully thought out by George Allan and *Zool* was critically acclaimed with many Amiga publications scoring it over 95%. It could be argued that the later console ports surpassed the original due to better controls, but even those have a quintessentially Amiga feel about them. *Zool* is a unique game that not only gave Amiga fans their own mascot but also gave us a fresh experience in a crowded genre. ★

BOSS RUSH

TACKLING THE BOSSES OF THE NTH DIMENSION

THE HUM-BUGGER

■ The first boss takes the shape of a giant bumblebee that buzzes about the screen dropping bombs.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Stick to one side of the screen and jump up and down. This helps you avoid bombs and makes it easier to aim your stars.

JIMMIES KILLER GUITAR

■ This evil guitar is pulling the strings of your death, can you pluck the right cords to ensure victory?

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Use your slide to avoid the swoop attack before jumping and throwing a barrage of stars at this instrument of evil.

BANANA AND ALARM CLOCK

■ This boss has gone bananas and shoots pips at you while a clock flings mini bananas in the air.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Jump over the clock as it moves underneath then take your chance to jump and unleash ninja stars when both are on the opposite side of the screen.

GIANT DRILLER KILLER

■ This drill will cut away at the floor while attacking you. Not finishing him off quickly leads to a spiky death.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Continually jump from platform to platform then quickly turn in the air to fire ninja stars. Just be careful of the spikes either side.

MAXIE THE ROBOT

■ This robot fires electric bolts at awkward angles that will have you scurrying from side to side as it jumps.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Wait on one side of the screen and jump to fire. Once it gets close to you run underneath to the other side and repeat.

TWO EYED THING

■ An onslaught of projectiles awaits you in this dramatic showdown as the final boss puts you in its deadly sights.

HOW TO BEAT THEM

Stand on the top-left platform and duck while shooting. When the projectiles are aimed lower, jump to avoid them.

C-SMASH VRS

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** RAPID EYE MOVERS
» **DEVELOPER:** WOLF & WOOD
» **RELEASE:** 23 MARCH 2023
» **PLATFORM:** PS5
» **GENRE:** ACTION/SPORTS

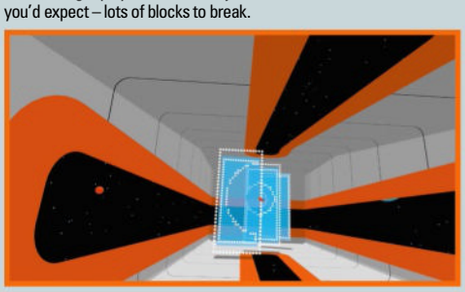
COULD A CULT-FAVOURITE DREAMCAST GAME REALLY BE RE-IMAGINED AS AN ARCADE SPORTS EXPERIENCE BEFITTING THE LATEST IN VR TECHNOLOGY? WE SPEAK TO THE TEAM THAT HAS TAKEN ON THE MIGHTY TASK OF DOING JUST THAT

WORDS BY NICK THORPE

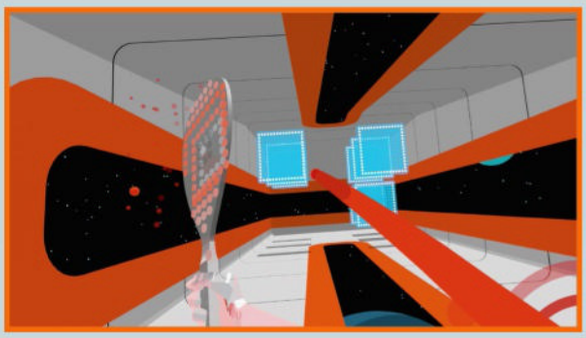
We'll be honest, dear reader – if you'd approached us on 1 January 2023 and asked us to place a bet that the cult Dreamcast favourite *Cosmic Smash* would get a VR revival before the year was out, we'd have advised you to spend your money on magic beans. Although we're converts to the VR cause and we're certainly very fond of Sega's futuristic cross between squash and *Breakout*, we'd never once imagined combining the two. Yet it's the kind of idea that makes perfect sense once it's presented to you, melding the simple appeal of the original with the physicality that makes games like *Wii Sports* and *Beat Saber* so much fun.

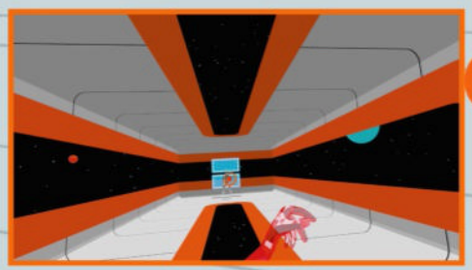
But who would dare to revive a Japan-only Dreamcast game for PlayStation VR2? Enter Jorg Tittel, a multi-talented individual whose work spans plays, films, videogames and more. Jorg has been a major Sega fan since the mid-Eighties, and wrote for gaming publications including the *US Official Dreamcast Magazine* to help pay for his studies. "When the Dreamcast was no more, I picked up an issue of *Famitsu*, and there was a screenshot of a fucking cool-looking game, and it said DC in the article – I don't read Japanese very well but I knew it was Dreamcast. I had to know what it was, and I imported a copy and I fell in love." That game was *Cosmic Smash*, and Jorg has acquired the licence to produce the game from Sega via his new publishing outfit Rapid Eye Movers.

» [PS5] Single-player action looks just as you'd expect – lots of blocks to break.



» [PS5] Super shots no longer sap your remaining time, making the experience less stressful.

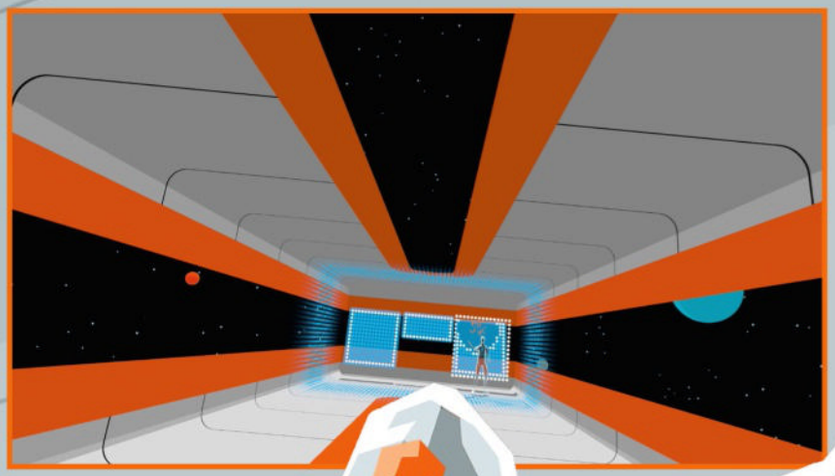




» [PS5] This is how you serve, sort of gesturing the ball in your direction with your empty hand.

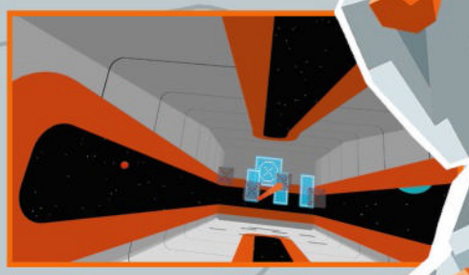
Jorg has teamed up with the VR specialist developer Wolf & Wood for the project. "We weren't familiar with *Cosmic Smash*," says founder and creative director Ryan Bousfield. "We're looking at it with that fresh perspective – we made four VR titles prior to this, how do we translate what we know about VR from a third-person super avatar that does backflips?" Fortunately, the team was quickly able to identify the fun. "When you hit the right thing, it sets up a chain of events – you get to the back and then the ball bounces back and forth between the blocks. When it peaks it has almost this *Peggle* feel."

As well as a single-player Journey mode, one major component of *C-Smash VRS* that wasn't a factor in the original is multiplayer. "We've



» [PS5] Success! The opponent's block is destroyed in a multiplayer game, scoring you valuable points.

» [PS5] You can interact with your faceless opponent in the lead-up to a multiplayer match.

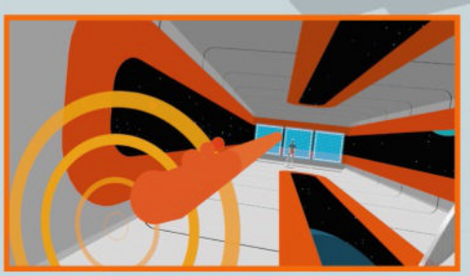


» [PS5] A variety of different block types have different effects when hit, just like before.

got five modes planned at the moment and they do go in more obscure directions as well," Ryan explains. One of these modes is called Firewall. "We originally called it 'tug of war', which doesn't really fit a space setup," says Ryan. "We've got a set of neutral blocks in the middle, embedded in a wall, and then each player has their own ball. And as you hit the blocks and you've got more in your colour, the wall comes closer to the other player, so that there is a push and pull." Co-op play is also planned.

Style is a hugely important part of *C-Smash VRS*, with a subtle flat shaded look to the whole game. "The reason we all wanted to go for a flat shaded style is because to me, graphic design doesn't have shit effects. A good piece of graphic design exists without the need of a lens flare or a drop shadow," says Jorg. "I just wanted to also stand out from the other games out there. I want to have a game that will look new for 20, 30, 40, 50 years," he continues, citing the timeless looks of games like *Rez*, *Inside* and *Another World*. "Those games have a fucking style that they committed to so hard. They didn't want to bow to the fucking technological wank nonsense, but that doesn't mean that they weren't technologically more advanced – they were because reduction requires more thinking." Speaking of *Rez*, Ken Ishii is a contributor to the *C-Smash VRS* soundtrack – "They're all original tracks, no licensed tracks," as Jorg points out – as is synth artist Danalogue.

The game that made Jorg a Sega fan was *Out Run*. "It didn't try to kill me, it just made me experience the joys of existing," he says, and that's the feeling he's hoping to inspire in players with *C-Smash VRS*. "I don't want people to escape into my game only for it to try and kill them. I want them to travel into my game so they can fucking feel good, and then return to their day-to-day lives feeling enriched." There's no need to wait and see about that – if you've already picked up PlayStation VR2, a demo of *C-Smash VRS* is out now.



» [PS5] An orange trail traces the ball's trajectory as you send it toward your opponent.

SMASHING FROM SCRATCH

Our experience with the C-Smash VRS demo

We've had the chance to play a demo of *C-Smash VRS* and the game did prove reassuringly familiar. Using the PlayStation VR2 controllers, one hand is used as your racquet hand and while you don't need to jump around to perform super shots, you do need to hold a trigger button. The other hand handles lateral movement with the analogue stick as well as service. Rather than performing a standard tennis serve, the ball starts off floating in front of you and you need to reach out and pull it toward you.

A practice game allowed us to enjoy ten of the classic single-player stages, but the highlight was the multiplayer game. It's not just tennis with a fancy skin – the game has a set time limit and you score by breaking blocks, which means that you not only have to get the ball past your opponent, but get it in the right place. Breaking all of the blocks means that the supply will be refreshed, granting more scoring opportunities. This proved to be good fun, although a tiebreaker mode might be needed as three of our four games ended in draws.

If the mention of *Wii Sports* elsewhere in the feature scared you, don't worry – this isn't a casual game and you'll need to be pretty precise with your shot placements to do well. We're not ashamed to say that our racquet skills could use some work, and if that's the case for you then there's a definite learning curve to overcome, but we enjoyed plugging away at it all the same.

THE MAKING OF HEROQUEST

WORDS BY GRAHAM PEMBREY

» Mike Vout co-created the *HeroQuest* videogame. He runs Big Head Games and manages development at 31st Union.

» Ian Stewart is the founder of Gremlin Graphics. He currently runs UrbanScan which specialises in mobile games.

THE BEST-SELLING BOARD GAME WAS FAITHFULLY BROUGHT TO LIFE ON HOME COMPUTERS BY 221B AND GREMLIN GRAPHICS. GRAB YOUR SWORD AND COME QUESTING AS WE HEAR FROM THE DEVELOPER AND THE PUBLISHER, PLUS THE CREATOR OF THE ORIGINAL TABLETOP CLASSIC

"I BEGAN TO TALK ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITY OF MAKING A SIMPLE FANTASY BOARD GAME FOR THE MASS MARKET"
STEPHEN BAKER

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **DEVELOPER:** 221B SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT
- **RELASED:** 1991
- **PLATFORM:** AMIGA, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** STRATEGY

» Stephen Baker invented the *HeroQuest* board game. He's worked at Hasbro and Games Workshop.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALCATRAZ
SYSTEM: AMIGA, PC
YEAR: 1992

DALEK ATTACK (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMIGA, C64
YEAR: 1992

THE JETSONS: THE COMPUTER GAME
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, C64
YEAR: 1992

Against a torchlit dungeon backdrop, a barbarian swings his sword wildly while a wizard, a dwarf and an elf battle orcs and other creatures of darkness. The iconic box art may already be firmly embedded in your memory and need no introduction. This is *HeroQuest*, the 1989 role-playing board game that swiftly became a colossal hit, thanks in large part to just how fun and accessible it was.

Older children and adults alike could enjoy its simpler take on *Dungeons & Dragons*-style high fantasy adventuring. And yet for all that learning the rules was straightforward, *HeroQuest* also offered a satisfyingly deep and varied fantasy experience. For some players it proved to be a gateway game that would lead them towards more complex tabletop experiences.

Two years after the board game had hit the shelves, home-computer owners would get the chance to experience a critically applauded videogame adaption of *HeroQuest* released across multiple systems, including the ZX Spectrum, Amiga and PC. But before jumping ahead and telling you too much about that digital descendent, we should look back at the story of the classic tabletop adventure, the rules and aesthetics of which ultimately underpin the gameplay of the videogame.

Board-game designer Stephen Baker had just moved from Games Workshop to Milton Bradley (owned by Hasbro) when he thought up the idea for *HeroQuest*. "I was a keen gamer and played a lot of tabletop gaming," Stephen tells us. "I've always had a passion for military history and toy soldiers. I also enjoyed role-playing games. I ran a regular group as the dungeon master for a role-playing game that was a blend of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Rolemaster*. Having joined Milton Bradley in 1986, I began to talk about the opportunity of making a simple fantasy board game for the mass market. At the time Games Workshop were growing and 'choose your own adventure' books like *Fighting Fantasy* were hugely popular." It's not surprising that Stephen would later become excited by ▶

» [Amiga] Fans of the board game may recognise this Barrow Of The Witch Lord quest scene.

> "GREMLIN GAVE US A COPY OF THE BOARD GAME AND WE WENT AWAY AND PLAYED IT ALL NIGHT"
> DAVE VOUT

the videogame adaption of his game. Part of his initial vision was to create an experience that was highly visual and interactive. "When I think about why I enjoy wargaming, it's because of the spectacle; the grandeur of a modelled battlefield covered with woods, buildings and miniatures," Stephen explains. "Right from the beginning I wanted the game to have the look and feel of a role-playing game with miniatures and terrain. I wanted a 3D experience that would help bring the narrative to life." This was partly achieved by Milton Bradley and Stephen's previous employer Games Workshop working together, with the latter creating the game's artwork and miniatures in the mould of its Warhammer universe.

During rounds of iterating his design and having it play-tested by pupils at a school, Stephen devised a Gameboard that would act as the underlying dungeon structure for every quest. One player assumes the role of an evil wizard, named Morcar in the European release or Zargon in the US release. Using a Quest Book for guidance, the evil wizard player places doors, furniture and enemies onto the Gameboard. These environmental details are revealed gradually as up to four hero players complete quests for the good wizard Mentor. This allowed for huge variation and a sense of exploration despite the game area remaining consistent. "The Gameboard is one of the most iconic elements of the game and solved so many problems," says Stephen. "People could relate a lot quicker to a game that had a Gameboard. It made the game faster as players did not have to search for the right tile. The Gameboard ensured that the game remained contained in the centre of the play area, and the consistent map area made laying out the Quest Book so much easier. At first, I had worried that the Gameboard would limit the quest designs, but I soon found there is so much you can do to use the layout."

» [Amiga] While the wizard and elf have magic abilities, the barbarian excels in brute strength.

The huge commercial success of the board game piqued the interest of Gremlin Graphics. By this time in the early Nineties, Gremlin had published everything from the classic platformer *Monty On The Run* to *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*. But with 8-bit conversions of *Gauntlet* also part of its catalogue, publishing a dungeon-crawling fantasy game wasn't completely new ground for the company. Gremlin founder and owner Ian Stewart remembers the early conversations with Milton Bradley going well. "I can remember visiting them and having initial discussions about *HeroQuest* and *Space Crusade*. They were obviously very happy with our pitch and licensing was agreed," says Ian. *Space Crusade* was a Warhammer 40,000 universe board game that was also created by Stephen, and Gremlin would eventually create a videogame version one year after *HeroQuest* using a different development team.

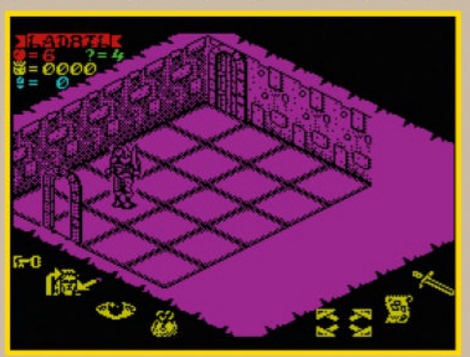
Once licensing was secured and a broad pitch about what it could offer had been accepted by Milton Bradley, all Gremlin needed to get the project going was a development team. As luck would have it, it would find one just down the road in Sheffield, in the form of fledgling studio 221b Software Development. Dave Vout had only just left his last job to launch the company. "A group of us were working at Krysalis Software as a development team working on *Space Harrier II* and *Klax*," Dave tells us. "It was Jason Wilson

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH QUEST IS BEST?

C64

■ The C64 release was coded by Dave Vout and delivers the same well-designed gameplay that exists across all the available conversions. Isometric graphics, turn-based battling and quests from the board game are all present and correct. The colour scheme is pretty beige, but it plays great.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ Colourful scenes abound here with bright backgrounds making every screen feel like a distinct location. You could almost forget you're in a dark and dingy dungeon. As with the other 8-bit conversions, much of the action is conveyed through text descriptions.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ This port swapped the Spectrum's vibrant backgrounds for a persistent blue wash with little colour contrast, apart from on the battle screen when a few other colours emerge. Moving the cursor around feels a little sluggish too, making this a slightly weaker version of the game.

» [C64] The 8-bit conversions use text descriptions to convey combat encounters.

(art), Nick Kimberley (code) and myself (also code). Being young and suffering 'the grass is always greener' syndrome, we decided to leave and set up our own development business. The first thing we did was approach local companies. Gremlin were looking for a development team for *HeroQuest* and asked us to come in, later telling us this was mainly because we were local!"

At this point, Dave and his team hadn't played the *HeroQuest* board game, so some rapid research was needed. "Gremlin gave us a copy of the board game and we went away and played it all night. The next day we wrote up our design, with Jason Wilson doing the drawings for it," Dave recalls. With haste needed and limited technology available, the design document came together in a manner reminiscent of a DIY fanzine. "We did it all on paper with a text editor and left gaps for images which we then glued into the document," Dave explains. "We photocopied it in a copy shop and bound it between two pieces of coloured card. It was super basic, but we went back in to see Gremlin and they liked it. They asked us, 'How much?' and we said, 'Erm, well, how does £32,000 sound?' They said, 'Done!' We left with an advance and a contract, and that was the start of 221b."

For all that it may have been basic in its presentation, the design document 221b

» [PC] You can get quite tactical with spells, using them to attack, heal or move obstacles.

» [PC] Will you take out his henchmen first, or go straight for the powerful gargoyle?

» [Amiga] It looks like this Chaos Warrior will knock two health points off our barbarian.

AMIGA

■ At a time when many Amiga games required lots of floppy disk swapping, *HeroQuest* loading quickly from a single disk seemed like a stroke of magic. It's a big step up from the 8-bit versions, with animated character battles being one of the notable differences.

ATARI ST

■ While the graphics and sound aren't quite as good as the Amiga game, the Atari ST version arguably makes up for that lost ground in the performance stakes. From character animations to loading times, everything feels pleasingly slick and speedy.

PC

■ The DOS game is visually superior to all other ports, with notable menu screen and animation improvements. Our only complaint is that the character-sprite proportions seem a little off, most notably on the barbarian who looks a bit squashed.

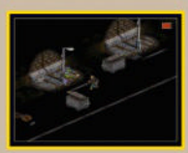
TURNING THE TABLES

OTHER TABLETOP RPG ADAPTATIONS

THE WARLOCK OF FIRETOP MOUNTAIN

■ The first Fighting Fantasy gamebook became an *Adventure*-like ZX Spectrum game in 1984 (pictured). Games Workshop released a board game in 1986, then Tin Man Games used that as the basis for *The Warlock Of Firetop Mountain: Goblin Scourge Edition* on the Nintendo Switch in 2018.

SHADOWRUN



■ Cyberpunk and high fantasy collided in the 1989 tabletop RPG *Shadowrun*, which spawned several videogames including the pictured SNES release. It's an impressive and forward-thinking RPG that blends mechanics from the tabletop adventure with real-time action. Copies fetch high prices in good condition.

SPACE HULK

■ If you enjoyed the jump scares of *Alien Resurrection*, you might also love *Space Hulk*. An Amiga release based on the Warhammer 40,000-themed board game, it blends first-person shooting with multi-camera, tactical co-ordination of a squad of Space Marine Terminators. It's honestly terrifying.

WARHAMMER: DARK OMEN

■ Games Workshop brought its enormously popular fantasy IP to the Sony PlayStation and PC with *Shadow Of The Horned Rat* and then this similar sequel. Pitting you as an army commander, it offers a satisfying strategy experience in a familiar RTS game mould.

BALDUR'S GATE

■ BioWare spent three intense years developing this much-loved 1998 RPG, which is rooted in the rules and universe of Advanced Dungeons & Dragons, and it proved to be the developer's breakthrough hit. Across a sprawling open world, it gave players huge freedom to customise their experience.

» [Amiga] Low-level enemies can present a real threat when they gang up.

» [Amiga] Treasure chest or a trap? There's only one way to find out.

» [ZX Spectrum] Our sturdy dwarf hero shouldn't have a problem dealing with this orc.

» [Amiga] After surviving a quest, you can visit the armoury to spend your treasure on equipment.

▶ presented to Gremlin had clearly hit the right mark. Instead of proposing a full reworking of the popular board game, Dave and the team cleverly built their design around a very faithful adaptation of the tabletop experience. In many ways, playing the videogame version of *HeroQuest* is just like playing the board game. You select your characters and a quest, then set off on a journey of turn-based adventuring. There are naturally some subtle builds on the original game, such as a spinning coin that replaces the rolling dice, and enemy fights being animated. The action all takes place on an isometric board with nicely illustrated touches that Jason Wilson introduced, such as the Gameboard sitting on top of a book while the grizzled evil wizard controlling your enemies looks on from a corner. "That was totally Jason's idea and in the original pitch," Dave says of the way the action is framed on-screen. "We did a bit of back and forth on the actual look and layout, but it was mostly as originally designed."

Between quests you can spend money to bolster your characters with extra weapons and equipment. The prospect of levelling-up gives you an extra incentive to keep characters alive between quests and gather all the gold you can. A novel aspect of the game for the time was also that it offered a four-way multiplayer experience even if you only had one joystick, as you could simply pass the controller around with each turn.

Although he wasn't directly part of making the videogame, Stephen was glad to be involved during the design process. "I remember working with the folks at Gremlin," he says. "They were kind enough to share their early development. I went to visit them several times throughout the process. It was great to see how they faithfully translated the game and yet added to the look and feel." How did he feel about the finished product? "I loved

» [PC] Viewing the map during the Castle Of Mystery quest, which sees our heroes teleport between rooms.

» [ZX Spectrum] You can search rooms for traps, treasure or hidden doors.

it!" enthuses Stephen. "The animations and adaptation of the game art were great. I still remember the excitement of seeing the game come to life in another format." Ian also tells us that from Gremlin's perspective, he found Stephen and his colleagues at Milton Bradley to be helpful and "very professional" to work with, providing art materials and advice when needed.

Not content with limiting sales to a single platform, Gremlin wanted *HeroQuest* to be available for all the popular home computers of the time.

"Working multi-platform was just something you had to do. The games market was fragmented across Europe and you had to cover all platforms. Cross-platform programming tools were very important," says Ian. This approach meant 221b would need to create a variety of different versions of the game, dialling the graphics, user interface and overall presentation up or down significantly according to the computing power available (see Conversion Capers boxout). Developers who worked with 221b to achieve this included Michael Hart and Roger Womack who coded the Amiga and PC games respectively.

> "THE GAMES MARKET WAS FRAGMENTED ACROSS EUROPE AND YOU HAD TO COVER ALL PLATFORMS"
> IAN STEWART

Each conversion required a separate approach and unsurprisingly this affected how quickly 221b could work. "We worked on the different versions all at the same time," Dave confirms. "I can't remember the exact timescale, but I know all the versions were created as planned but came in late." Dave remembers there being some tension between 221b and Gremlin about the work involved and the timings. "We ran out of cash but managed to get the game finished," he says. "Later we turned down the chance to make *Space Crusade* for Gremlin. In hindsight it was a mistake, but we were young and angry!" Ian recognises that it was a big project for Dave and the team. "The guys at 221b had to apply themselves as it was a pretty big ask," he recalls. "If my memory serves me right they worked well under pressure, or at least they gave the impression they did!"

Across platforms, *HeroQuest* went down very well with the games media on release. *Amiga Action* reported that, "The graphics are well drawn, the sound is atmospheric and the gameplay is brilliant." Meanwhile, the ZX Spectrum version was labelled "really engrossing" by *Crash* which also commented that, "The ability to involve four players in one game is great fun." A data-disk expansion with ten additional quests, *Return Of The Witch Lord*, was quickly released by Gremlin to complement the core game. Then in 1994, Gremlin published a sequel following a very similar formula to the first game, but with more advanced graphics. *HeroQuest II: Legacy Of Sorasil* was released for the Amiga 1200 and the Amiga CD32.

Dave counts *HeroQuest* among his game development highlights. "I've made a number of games over the years that stand out and *HeroQuest* is definitely one of them. I am proud of it because I did a lot of the design work and glued the team together, and we were very young. But we ran out of money and fell out with Gremlin, so it has a bittersweet feel," says Dave. Would he consider returning to the series if the opportunity came up? "Every few years I think I will and investigate it, especially in recent years on mobile. The problem is, the rights were mixed up in the past so it's not at all easy to get. Now Hasbro has produced a new version and expansions, so probably that bird has flown, but it would be nice to revisit it."

With the board game indeed having been revived (see A Heroic Return boxout) we'd absolutely love to hear news of a modern videogame adaptation. In the meantime, the game Dave and Ian released remains an excellent way to experience Stephen's iconic creation. Whether you venture forth on a computer screen or a tabletop, you'll find *HeroQuest* still retains its otherworldly magic more than three decades on. ✱

A HEROIC RETURN

HOW CROWDFUNDING RELAUNCHED HEROQUEST

"The quest is calling," read a cryptic message placed alongside a timer on a new website that appeared in September 2020. Well, the message was somewhat cryptic anyway. It didn't take eagle-eyed observation to notice logos for *HeroQuest* and Avalon Hill, an imprint of Hasbro. The classic board game was coming back.

When the clock stopped, a $1 million crowdfunding campaign was revealed. A mere 24 hours later, the goal was met. Backers could look forward to the same game they loved, redrawn artwork and new miniatures, albeit with Games Workshop references subtly removed to mark the company no longer being involved.

Stephen was pleased to be asked for his input again. "Hasbro very kindly invited me to write a new adventure when they relaunched *HeroQuest*," he tells us. "It had been over 30 years since I had written a quest. It was a lot of fun to get back into the role of Mentor addressing the adventurer and designing new ways to use the Gameboard layout."

The relaunched game is a fantastic way to experience *HeroQuest*. Hasbro has also released various expansions, including *The Frozen Horror*. You may also be able to get hold of the 1989 original if you look around, but it's highly collectible and fully intact copies fetch increasingly high prices.

Merciless Mino
100
Air Booth
80
Lamb
29
Alan Attack
100
100
Evil Team
Gipson
Puyo
QA Fun Squad
33

Worms World Party

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION » 2001 » TEAM17

For a few months, back when I was 16, I had a temp job processing credit card applications. It wasn't particularly involved or interesting work, mostly just correcting any mistakes the optical character recognition software made when reading the scanned forms. What's more, the working conditions were pretty lousy – talking to your colleagues during a shift was forbidden, any performance below bonus level was insufficient, and the company even tracked employees' toilet breaks. It's funny because on my first day, I was sure I'd stumbled upon a decent workplace – if there was a PlayStation in the break room, how bad could it be?

The only game we ever played in that office was *Worms World Party*, but I rapidly came to realise that this wasn't *Worms* as I knew it. The first time I used a shotgun, the other players groaned. I had broken the most important unspoken rule – it doesn't matter who wins, and trying to win is a sin. The next player took his turn and proceeded to unleash a banana bomb on a crowded slope, taking out three of his own worms and two others, to the approval of the crowd. At that point, I grasped the aim of the game – combine spectacle and slaughter by using the craziest weapons to cause the most deaths.

This was amusing for a couple of sessions, but it was the kind of game born from the environment it was played in – a place where it was extraordinarily difficult to get a sense of purpose or feel like a winner, the kind of place you only work at because it's marginally preferable to being unemployed. A ritualistic, nihilistic orgy of destruction was the only thing that made us feel slightly alive, and we were just about well adjusted enough to confine it to *Worms*. It didn't take long for even that to feel hollow, and the early termination of my contract was a welcome relief.

THE MAKING OF SENTINEL RETURNS

GEOFF CRAMMOND'S THE SENTINEL WAS ONE OF THE MOST UNIQUE COMPUTER GAMES TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE EIGHTIES. A DECADE LATER A DARKER, MORE TWISTED AND EVEN MORE INTRIGUING VERSION EMERGED FROM PSYGNOSIS FOR THE PC AND SONY'S PLAYSTATION

WORDS BY RICHARD HEWISON

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** PSYGNOSIS
- **DEVELOPER:** HOOKSTONE
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **PLATFORM:** PC, PLAYSTATION
- **GENRE:** STRATEGY

If you've never played *The Sentinel*, imagine a game played on 3D checkerboard landscapes with plateaus of varying heights. Standing on the highest point in the landscape is a sinister creature known only as the Sentinel. It slowly rotates, watching the landscape as it tries to catch sight of, and drain energy from the player who is ascending to a position where they can absorb the Sentinel and replace it as ruler of the landscape.

The game was a strategic balancing act of energy expenditure, energy absorption, movement and stealth. The player could expend energy creating objects that allowed them to move across the landscape and absorb other objects to gain energy. As they made progress conquering the Sentinel on each new landscape, additional threats were introduced in the form of Sentries and Meanies to further thwart their efforts and make the task even harder.

Firebird Software snapped up Geoff Crammond's unique game after he demonstrated his nearly complete BBC Micro version. Geoff then converted it to the Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC and Atari ST. Mike Follin at Software Creations wrote a ZX Spectrum conversion based on the Amstrad version, Steve Bak produced an Amiga port based upon the Atari ST code, and the final PC conversion was written by Mark Roll.

Several years then passed by. Consoles capable of solid 3D and PCs with improved sound and graphical capabilities came along, and the idea of resurrecting *The Sentinel* began to form in the minds

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

ALFRED CHICKEN
SYSTEM: GAME BOY, SUPER GAME BOY (JAPAN)
YEAR: 1994

ZOOP (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: PC, VARIOUS
YEAR: 1995

SENTINEL RETURNS
SYSTEM: PC, PLAYSTATION
YEAR: 1998

» [PC] The red sky in the morning wasn't enough warning for this defeated Sentinel.

» [PC 3DFX] Another glorious golden dawn for the Sentinel to defeat the player.

» [PlayStation] Trees hovering above the ground are perfectly normal in *Sentinel Returns*.

» [PC] Injecting a weird foetus gave life to the next landscape in this medically inspired menu screen.

» [PlayStation] A few sparkles behind the Sentinel permeate the otherwise gloomy skyline on this landscape.

JASON MCGANN

Cofounder and PC programmer. After Hookstone, Jason cofounded Mobius Entertainment with Ian J Bowden, Dave Box, and Gordon Hall, which became Rockstar Leeds in 2004. He continues to work in the games industry today.

EMMA KILLILEA

Sentinel Return's senior producer. Emma had a stint at EA after Psygnosis, then she completed a second degree in food manufacturing and started up a food company, which she later sold. Emma is currently working as a non-executive director in the public and private sectors, mentoring entrepreneurs and their start-up businesses.

of Geoff Crammond and his agent, John Cook. However, Geoff was too busy working on the highly successful *F1 Grand Prix* series, and so John, as No-Name Games, began looking for a suitable developer to bring the concept back to life for more modern hardware. This is when Hookstone and publisher Psygnosis entered the story.

"We had recently worked with John on *Zoop*," explains Hookstone cofounder Jason McGann, referring to the 1995 puzzle game. "When that was finished, he asked us to do the design and then development work for *Sentinel Returns*, although we were asked not to change the game, but to update it." Hookstone's first step was to try and get as much help out of Geoff Crammond as it could.

"We asked for the source code right at the beginning," says Jason. "When it eventually arrived, it was a printout of a cross-compiled version that unfortunately turned out to be useless as there were no comments in it."

In the limited time Hookstone had with the man himself, it was hoping to get an insight into the ideas behind the original design. "I saw the game as a power struggle set on this landscape," explains Jason. "When I talked to Geoff, I was expecting him to give me a lecture on power dynamics across society and all that kind of thing, and a real analysis on how it was all beautifully thought out with some kind of Marxist agenda, but it turns out it wasn't like that at all!"

> "I SAW THE GAME AS A POWER STRUGGLE SET ON THIS LANDSCAPE" JASON MCGANN

Geoff has admitted in the intervening years that *The Sentinel*'s design was dictated more by the limitations of the hardware than by a burning desire to create a tense, first-person 3D strategy game. For example, going from one spot to another by teleporting to a new point on the landscape was technically the only viable way of moving within the 3D world.

Without a more-detailed explanation of the source code, there was only one other thing Hookstone could try, as Jason explains. "We ended up taking a debugger and reverse engineering the original PC version. Jim Smart took the game apart and his work proved to be really helpful." Geoff was keen for the game to remain as true to the original as possible, but with a few proposed tweaks here and there. "He asked if we could texture the Sentinel and Geoff said he wanted the game to be spookier," recalls Jason. "There was also a stipulation that they wanted to have less levels. We suggested 666, but they wouldn't let us use that number, so we suggested 667, which was one more than evil, but in the end we went with 650. Other than that, they were both very hands off."

Before those conversations, Jason and graphic artist Ian Bowden had eagerly begun formulating their design approach, and an atmospheric vibe was top of their

CHRIS WHITE

PlayStation programmer for *Sentinel Returns*. Chris continues to work in software development as a senior software engineer and game tech lead. He has produced games across a wide variety of platforms for a number of different publishers over the past few decades, and he currently works for Kongregate.

JONATHAN FREEDMAN

After five years with Psygnosis and Playstation, Jonathan returned to Toronto, Canada where he joined the cable television business, first with two years at TELUS Communications and then ten years with ROGERS Communications. He is currently the general manager responsible for the creation and broadcast of content on a television network called Cable 14.

CONVERSION CAPERS

SHOULD YOU RETURN WITH THE PC OR PLAYSTATION?

PC

■ *Sentinel Returns* for Windows 95/98 looked fine using DirectX and Direct3D, but really shone with a 3DFX add-on card despite the maximum 800x600 resolution, with better textures and quicker 3D thanks to point-sampled texture mapping, anti-aliasing and Gouraud shading, along with many other advanced features. The PC version was more configurable and had the added bonus of the exclusive two-player mode, with players acting like Meanies in a race to be the first to beat the Sentinel.

PLAYSTATION

■ More powerful on the 3D front than the average PC back in the late-Nineties, the PlayStation version utilised the console's ability to do 3D quickly. It might have looked a little rougher than on the PC, especially when compared to the 3DFX-enhanced version, but once you got used to everything being done through the PlayStation controller (or used a PlayStation mouse if you had one), then the game played just as well.

» [PC 3DFX] Now and again, you get some interesting trippy purple skies.

» [PC 3DFX] Having absorbed the Sentinel, it's onwards and upwards to landscape 3.

» [PC 3DFX] Absorbing your former robot self is absolutely vital if you are to survive in *Sentinel Returns*.

list. "We were going for spooky anyway," says Jason. "I was listening to music like Nirvana, Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson, so I was following this bleak, nihilistic arc of music. Then Cliff Davies introduced me to Snoop Dog and Body Count, and that was the kind of mood we had in the office at the time."

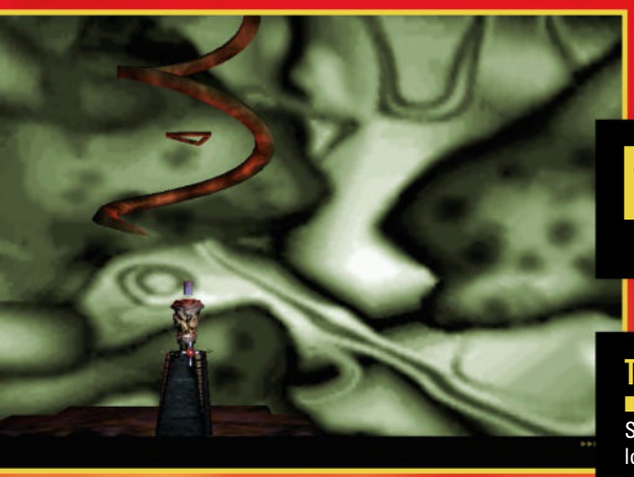
The Sentinel was bright and colourful, with angular geometric shapes representing the landscape, the trees, boulders, robots, Sentries, Meanies and the eponymous Sentinel. The 1998 *Sentinel Returns* looked and felt very different. It was dark, moody and quite foreboding. Lightning flashes permeated the ominously distorted sky, and the landscape and objects looked gloomy and Gothic. Trees were barely recognisable, and the whole vibe was one of darkness, horror, and depression. "We wanted some kind of weird, 18th-century German, cultish aspect to the art design," says Jason. "The foetus on the menu screen was inspired by medical textbooks. Ian and I visited this old dusty bookshop in Harrogate for research, and we ended up with an old medical and *Frankenstein* kind of vibe, with a weird Jules Verne trippy look."

> "GEOFF SAID HE WANTED THE GAME TO BE SPOOKIER" JASON MCGANN

That design ethos permeated everything, and it was particularly important to get the titular Sentinel's look nailed down. "The design we ended up with was about the thousandth that we had sketched," remembers Jason. "It started off as the same shape as the original, but we just redrew it over and over for what felt like a really long time, and it evolved, and all the bits added to it just became more and more twisted and scarecrow-like."

Other decisions had to be made about the methods used to generate the 3D world. "We thought about ray tracing the graphics as we had the processing power to do that," says Jason. "In the end we went with the smoother, real-time 3D graphics because everybody we showed it to preferred it that way."

The PC version written by Jason, which could utilise the popular add-on 3DFX board for much improved 3D and textures, was about two-thirds complete when publisher Psygnosis decided to switch priority over to a PlayStation version, as Psygnosis senior producer Emma Killilea explains. "Whilst *Sentinel Returns* was in production,



[PC 3DFX] Viewed from another robot, waiting to ascend to the next landscape.

I remember going to the Liverpool HQ and presenting it to a large number of top execs in a darkened, stuffy board room. It was a make-or-break presentation. If it had gone badly, funding and development would have stopped."

Thankfully, that didn't happen, but the decision to move development to Sony's new console was a fairly seismic shift, as Sony worked to grab more market share for their relatively new console. "Switching to the PlayStation turned into a bit of a nightmare," says Jason. "When we started there hadn't been any technical considerations made for a PlayStation version, and they also wanted it to work with a PlayStation mouse when there weren't many games that were mouse compatible. Had we started out on the PlayStation, then gone to the PC after then the transition would have been a lot smoother. I remember Ian and Chris working really hard to get that all working. I think Peter Tattersall did a little bit of graphics work, but it was mostly Ian, with Dave Box working on the user interface front-end."

It also didn't help that the PlayStation programmer Chris White was unfamiliar with the original game, as he freely admits. "First I knew was when it was acquired as a possible port for Hookstone. Before then I had no clue about it!" Getting the PlayStation version working from Jason's unfinished PC code was a challenge. "The initial bulk of the work was to get it compiling within the PlayStation dev tools," continues Chris. "Then came the render engine using the PlayStation's GPU, then the other console-specific code for the control system, the RayCaster, and so on."

Those challenges certainly gave Chris lots to ponder, with the RayCaster, used for generating both the player's and the Sentinel's views within the 3D world, causing problems at first. "The initial native code port produced a horrible one frame per second, which was eventually found to be down to the RayCaster, and it took

MASTERING SENTINEL RETURNS

FIVE KEY SENTINEL STRATEGIES TO ABSORB

TURN AROUND BRIGHT EYES

■ Upon entering a landscape, study the Sentinel and note which way it rotates. Now look at the geography of the landscape closest to you and plot a pathway to an area nearest the Sentinel where you can remain just behind its 28-degree field of view.

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

■ If you can absorb enough energy from the surrounding landscape, quickly move to a mid-height plateau, build a precariously tall tower of boulders level with the Sentinel, then place your robot on top. Although horribly exposed, you should be able to quickly absorb the Sentinel.

I SEE TREES OF GREEN

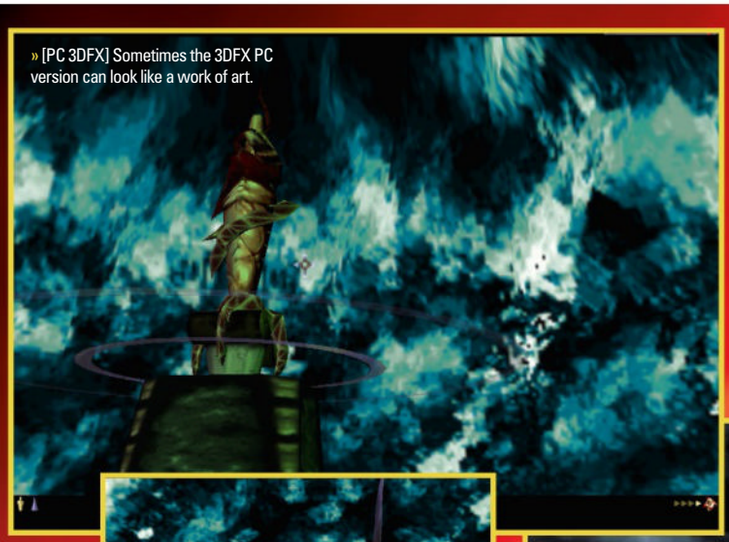
■ The Sentinel is friendly to trees, so use this to your advantage. When caught directly in the Sentinel's gaze, create a tree directly in front of your robot between you both, reducing the threat and giving you precious extra moments to plan your next move.

WE HAVE ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD

■ There is no overall time limit to conquering a landscape. Sometimes you can't absorb your old robot or boulders before the energy is redistributed as trees by the Sentinel. Don't sweat it. Reclaim the energy later from trees, just make sure you don't run out entirely!

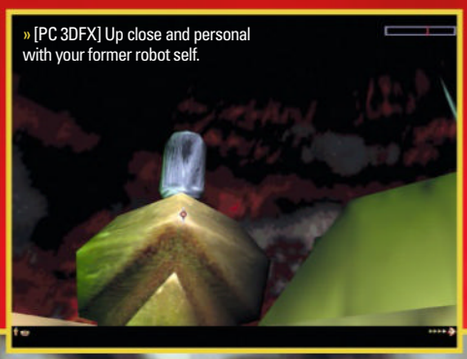
MAKING YOUR MIND UP

■ Sometimes you want to see if the way forward is clear. Plant a boulder on the square you want to move to and then wait a second or two. If it doesn't turn into a tree, you should be safe to continue.



» [PC 3DFX] Sometimes the 3DFX PC version can look like a work of art.

» [PlayStation] The PlayStation version had a rendered intro that sets the scene for the game.



» [PC 3DFX] Up close and personal with your former robot self.

» [PC 3DFX] Your starting position can often be quite far away from the Sentinel.

» [PC 3DFX] A Meanie, Sentry and Sentinel all lined up against you.

PAYING RESPECTS

UNOFFICIAL HOMAGES TO SENTINEL

SENTRY

■ This freeware effort was created by Momor Productions in 1998/99, written for Windows 95/98. Sentry featured an optional red/green or red/blue 3D spectacles mode and played exactly the same as the game that inspired it, although the difficulty could be adjusted. Icons were added to the main display, and sparkly effects showed when an object was under the Sentinel's gaze. Some nice 3D effects were used when the player moved to new areas.

ZENITH

■ *Zenith* first appeared in 2005 and was another freeware interpretation for Windows. Programmer John Valentine updated the clean-cut look of the original game and added some nice fog effects. OpenGL and more modern hardware gave quick fluid movement within the 3D landscapes, and larger landscapes were also possible. Gameplay was almost identical, except Meanies were removed and the player could tweak many of the game's parameters.

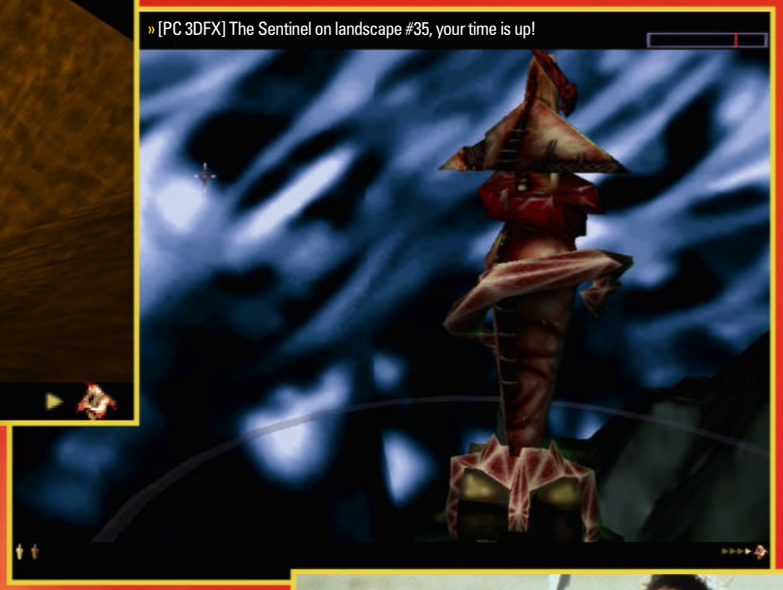
AUGMENTINEL

■ Simon Owen takes a different approach with *Augmentinel*, which runs on Windows 7 or above, emulating the ZX Spectrum version of *The Sentinel*, reskinning it with the palette and landscape colours from the PC conversion, and using the Amiga music and sky map feature from the 16-bit conversions. However, by far the best addition is VR mode, compatible with SteamVR, OpenXR, and OpenVR, which places the player in the game itself.

ARCHIPELAGOS

■ Brought to 16-bit computers in 1989 by the same producer who managed *The Sentinel* at Firebird, *Archipelagos* was the only commercially released title clearly influenced by Geoff Crammond's game. Instead of a Sentinel, you had an all-powerful Obelisk to defeat, by draining energy from standing stones spread out across archipelagos – islands in the game that were created by a mysterious race known as the Ancients.

» [PlayStation] Reclaiming energy from your boulders is often done in a hurry.



» [PC 3DFX] The Sentinel on landscape #35, your time is up!

> "I SUGGESTED WE TRY AND HIRE JOHN CARPENTER TO DO THE MUSIC"
> **JONATHAN FREEDMAN**

several rewrites to get it more playable."

Another development that happened just before the shift in focus to the PlayStation was much more welcome. Canadian Jonathan Freedman was the studio manager at Psygnosis Leeds' office, and he recalls how getting a famous Hollywood writer, director and musician on board came about. "I said we should try and create music like John Carpenter's. I was a huge fan, so I suggested we try and hire John Carpenter to do the music. At the time it sounded crazy, but I felt, 'Why not?' I did the research and was eventually pointed towards his agent, and from there it became a simple question of availability and negotiating the money. I had the pleasure to speak with John and his agent on the phone about what we were looking for, and it took less than a minute for John to start listing off suggestions and ideas."

With everything quickly agreed, Psygnosis' musician Gary McKill and caretaker producer Alan Raistrick flew out to Arizona to meet with John Carpenter on the set of his latest film, *Vampires*, and in true John Carpenter fashion, he composed the theme music for *Sentinel Returns* over a few hours in his studio, without even breaking a sweat. "Gary McKill worked on the actual arrangement," recalls Jason. "John Carpenter produced sketches of the music tracks and then Gary embellished them, so Gary was a bit of an unsung hero on the game score."

Listening to the tracks that John Carpenter composed instantly evokes memories of *Assault On Precinct 13*, *Halloween*, *The Fog* and *Escape From New York*, with a dash of Tangerine Dream, and the music proved a perfect fit, as Emma reveals. "It definitely added a creepiness to the game. In the beginning, I would panic a lot around my last move or two and make a mess of the level. I was relieved to see it had the same effect in the test room when work on it started there!"

[PlayStation] Absorbing the Sentinel from a safer (?) distance.

The PC version of *Sentinel Returns* included a two-player option, introducing a new element to the game design for the first time.

Playing across a local network, dial-up or via a null-modem cable had become immensely popular, but the two-player feature wasn't something that Hookstone was keen to implement. "It was a bit of a faff and an afterthought to be honest," admits Jason. In two-player mode, each player was in a race to beat the Sentinel first, and the players had the added ability to inhibit each other's chances of success, draining energy from their opponent and forcing them to teleport to a random spot elsewhere on the landscape.

Looking back now, Jason concludes his thoughts on *Sentinel Returns* and how it turned out. "I would do loads differently now, but at the time I was quite pleased with it. I would have liked more time and I would have done more with the backgrounds. I really wanted to add a smoky, laser effect to the Sentinel as its gaze swept across the landscape. Unfortunately, that was technically too costly, and I talked myself out of it.

» Writer, director and musician John Carpenter composed the music for *Sentinel Returns* while he worked on *Vampires*.

"We knew it wasn't going to be a blockbuster even though I think the marketing people thought they could turn it into that. It was always going to be a slow burner, so I wanted it to be an arty kind of experimental thing, upping the cult aspects of it because I thought that the people who would buy it would be into that kind of thing as well. It was very much a product of the time, and it was certainly of my mindset. The game itself all belongs to Geoff Crammond. We just took his design and ramped up the mood."

The Sentinel was a game design decades ahead of the curve, and *Sentinel Returns* continued the tradition, speeding everything up in the process. Placing the player directly within a 3D landscape, teleporting to different spaces in that world, and trying to outwit an opponent are all elements found in modern 3D VR gaming. Now there's an idea...

Nyko Intercooler EX

» PLATFORM: Xbox 360 **» YEAR:** 2007 **» COST:** £14.99 (launch), £10+ (today, boxed), £6+ (today, unboxed)

External cooling fans for consoles had existed before the arrival of the Xbox 360, but rarely drew much attention since most consoles had adequate thermal management. But as rumours spread that Microsoft's second console might be particularly unreliable, players looked for ways to protect their investments, and the Nyko Intercooler shipped over half-a-million units in around six months. However, allegations that the Intercooler itself was damaging consoles soon began to surface, with users complaining of scorched power ports and even the device melting itself onto the console, leading Microsoft to advise against its use.

Like its predecessor, the Intercooler EX is a plastic unit housing three large fans. The EX version has a revised shape designed to accommodate the Wireless Networking Adapter, and it more securely locks to the console in an attempt to prevent short circuits in the pass-through power port. The Intercooler EX was ultimately short-lived, as the Intercooler TS arrived in 2008 with key upgrades including a separate power supply and a thermostat to regulate fan speed. Whether or not the Intercoolers aided system longevity remains unproven. *

ESSENTIAL GAME

Duke Nukem Forever

The Duke's long-awaited return was a real damp squib when it arrived in 2011. *X-Play*'s review criticised the game writing that it "portrays Duke as little more than a psychopathic, violently misogynistic, witless thug", while others called out clunky controls, outmoded design and dated pop-culture references. So why are we recommending it? That's simple – during its elongated development, as well as a spat between the former co-owners of 3D Realms in 2022, plenty of hot air was spewed about the game. With the Intercooler EX, you might have a chance of clearing it.

Nyko Intercooler EX fact

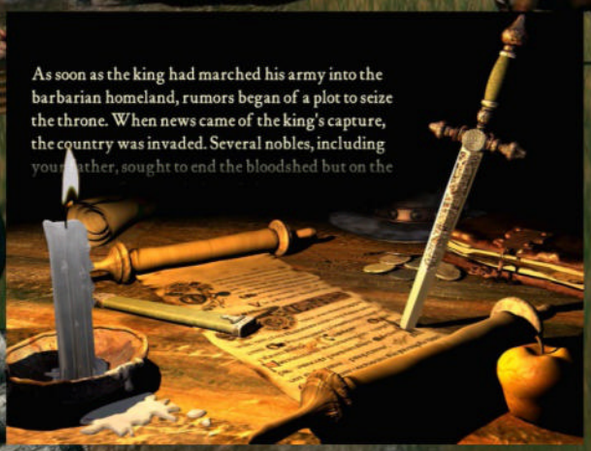
■ Both black and white versions of the Intercooler EX were made, to match Xbox 360 Elite and regular Xbox 360 consoles. The white versions appear to be more common on the secondary market.

SUPPLIED BY **EVAN AMOS**

THE HISTORY OF STRONGHOLD

MUCH LIKE THE FORTRESSES YOU BUILD IN THE GAME, STRONGHOLD HAS HELD STEADY OVER THE YEARS DEVOTED TO ITS ONE UNIQUE NICHE: BUILDING AND DEFENDING YOUR CASTLE. WE SPEAK TO THE SERIES' DEVELOPER FIREFLY STUDIOS, WHOSE HISTORY HAS BEEN TIED TO THE SUCCESS OF THE STOIC STRATEGY SERIES

WORDS BY
ADAM BARNES


As soon as the king had marched his army into the barbarian homeland, rumors began of a plot to seize the throne. When news came of the king's capture, the country was invaded. Several nobles, including

» [PC] There's a certain degree of *Monty Python* to the voice acting, but fans will remember it well to this day.

Some game developers have built their companies from a breadth of game titles, others specialise in one genre to build their expertise in a very specific area. Then there are those who pick a niche, scurry away to a corner of the industry somewhere and build a franchise around doing that one thing but doing it very well. Firefly Studios is such a developer, which has found that its passion for a very specific type of game – namely one about castles – has enabled it to not only survive some of the hardest changes in the industry, but to grow as a developer.

Stronghold itself is a name that means a lot to a certain type of gamer. If you were a strategy game fan in the Noughties, then in all likelihood you were playing on the PC and have probably given *Stronghold* a whirl. "This had been about computer game number 30 for me," says Simon Bradbury, one of the three founders of Firefly alongside Eric Oullette and David Lester. "I'd been making little tiddly ones since the mid-Eighties, like soccer managers and things like that when essentially you'd make them all in two months." But the main experience around which Firefly Studios formed was that of the economic strategy games *Caesar*, which Simon had been the main programmer on. "We definitely felt confident because we'd come off the back of a string of successful strategy titles at Impressions and Sierra with *Caesar* and then went on to do *Pharaoh*, *Zeus* and *Cleopatra*, the whole brand carried on. For us, we knew that was a winning formula, the question was how do we turn that into a company."

» [PC] Levels that require you to be the siege captain give you a finite amount of units to destroy a castle with.

» [PC] This turtling style of RTS game, where you're really only defending for most of the time, has really only been done by *Stronghold*.

> "WE DEFINITELY FELT CONFIDENT BECAUSE WE'D COME OFF THE BACK OF A STRING OF SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY TITLES AT IMPRESSIONS AND SIERRA"
> **Simon Bradbury**

The core idea, then, was to work from the foundation that the likes of *Caesar* had set prior, but with a view to build a new franchise. Those earlier Impressions games heavily revolved around balancing the economy of expanding Roman cities, but it was the military side of the game that was indirectly the inspiration for *Stronghold*. "We really liked the idea with *Caesar* that we had a city sim and we had some kind of external threat with the barbarians that came in," explains Simon, "but pretty much that was a piece that was bolted onto the game." Simon adds that they wanted a strategy game that was essentially all about defending and that dictated the kind of game it would have to be. "We wanted to make that sim side of it the beating heart of it and then, by necessity, had to have an RTS on top," explains Simon.

While this mix of RTS and economic city building was what drew players into *Stronghold* when it released on Windows and Mac in 2001, it's arguably its tone that many remember the most. Its caricature enemy lords in the Snake, the Pig, the Rat and the Wolf were intentionally removed from any historical truth, which also allowed the game to skip the typical po-faced approach to the mediaeval setting that most games did. Instead it was about "the spirit of castles" rather than a real rendition of any given time in British warfare. "I'd like to say it was a cunning plan, but I think it was one of those beer-related decisions to not to try to recreate an exact mediaeval scenario," explains Simon, meaning *Stronghold* was able to be as "outrageous or as funny as we wanted to be with it".

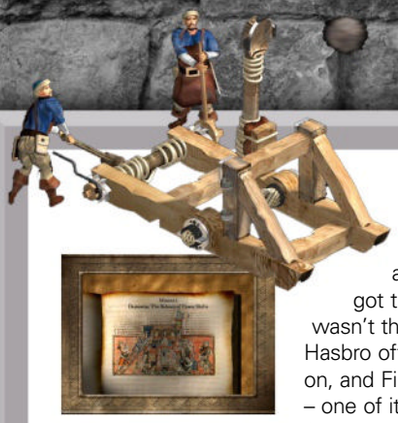
» [PC] The classic wooden fort doesn't stay long before the game switches to hardier stone castles.

The founders of Firefly Studios were confident in the idea and that they could pull it off – they'd already done so with similar products at Impressions Games and Sierra – so aside from hiring artists they could mostly just crack on. The main challenge was figuring out how to run a business. "We had to deal with big corps and learn how to read a contract and not completely duff it up," says Simon, "which by and large we had been OK on over the years. We had to hire people, we had to do payroll, we had to do tax. A lot of things you very quickly need to know and understand."

Finding a publisher wasn't particularly hard, either, and in fact *Stronghold* already had a good deal of interest. Originally the game was set to be published by Hasbro, which was chosen due to its size and capabilities in distribution. "But after about three or four months they decided to exit the computer gaming industry – which was a problem,

» Paul Harris started on *Stronghold 2* as a producer and is now Firefly Studios' COO.

» Simon Bradbury is one of Firefly Studios' cofounders and is still at the company today.



» [PC] One difference was that farms could only be built on oasis land, which meant careful placement of your food production was needed.

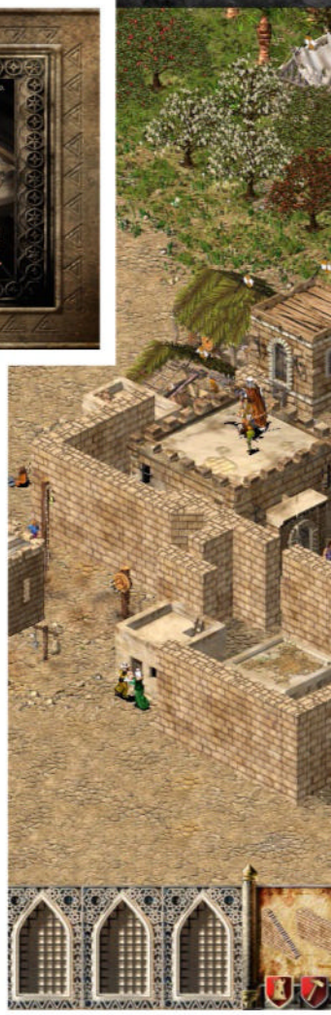
▶ obviously," laughs Simon. "We were driving down somewhere in the Thames valley to go and see their HQ in London, thinking it would be a big production meeting, it'll be all good. And we got there and they said, 'No, we're cancelling it.'" It wasn't the disaster it might normally have been, however; Hasbro offered to pay for the next milestone it had agreed on, and Firefly was able to call up Gathering Of Developers – one of its previous publishing offers – and sign with the Texan publisher right away.

This came with additional fortune, too, since Gathering Of Developers was then bought out by the massive Take Two, and ultimately meant that the otherwise niche PC RTS game could get much greater visibility. "I found myself in the deep end of a disused East German army swimming pool in one corner showing *Stronghold* and in the other corner there was Rockstar showing *Grand Theft Auto 3*," says Simon. "We kind of slingshotted off the Rockstar machine and got a ton of publicity. Everything aligned really: it was a great passion product, we got a great deal and we got published by Take Two and we were number one in Germany over Christmas for about five weeks. It basically cemented *Stronghold* as a brand at that point."

» [PC] The graphics of the buildings were changed to a more appropriate desert aesthetic in *Crusader*, but the gameplay was pretty much the same.

That German market was particularly important since historically the voracious demand for games of this ilk – from *The Settlers* to more niche naval trading games like *Patrician* – was largely where success could be found. Even outside of that market, *Stronghold* performed well enough for Take Two to want something new. "We basically built on top of *Stronghold* because Take Two were going, 'Oh that really worked, didn't it? Can we have some more please?'" *Stronghold: Crusader* quickly came around the following year and was highly anticipated by fans of the first game. "It was, to us, basically the fact that we hadn't done skirmish purposefully [in the original game] because we didn't have the time, and so luckily we were able to make *Crusader* our skirmish title," says Simon. "Essentially it was built on an already good game, and it just added a lot of thought into the AI and how the AI works.

» [PC] *Crusader* released a year after *Stronghold* and switched to a skirmish style of campaign, though a few historical battles were also included.



"WE GOT A BIG PUSH OUT WITH STRONGHOLD 2 FROM TAKE TWO TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY COMMISSIONED A BUNCH OF THOSE BIG FIBREGLASS MANNEQUINS"
Simon Bradbury

It's probably been the fan-favourite ever since, really."

However well *Crusader* had been received and as much as the fans preferred it in the long term, it still didn't quite live up to the sales success of the original game. Despite this, Take Two was content and requested a *Stronghold 2* to be put into production, which would later go on to release in 2005. This was a tough time for PC strategy game developers, however. "The time where it became difficult was just after *Stronghold* and *Crusader* came out," says Paul Harris, currently the COO at Firefly but had started at the studio on *Stronghold 2* as a producer. "It was that transition from 2D to 3D. So 3D had suddenly become this buzzword and everything suddenly had to become 3D and anything 2D was deemed old. I remember when the Saturn and the PlayStation came out, and just because Sega was still making 2D platformers those apparently were really old but the blocky-looking 3D PlayStation platformers was deemed to be the future."

As a result, *Stronghold 2* was built to be fully 3D, foregoing the pixels and isometric viewpoint of the previous two games. "The problem for RTSes was that 3D was so new at the time and the hardware was not very good at actually doing 3D and making an RTS in 3D was a really difficult prospect," says Paul of *Stronghold 2*'s biggest issues. Things weren't helped much by the changes in the market, either, which saw the RTS boom of the late-Nineties and early Noughties slowly beginning to dwindle thanks to the increasingly popular console market, the limited innovation occurring in the genre and the fact that a move to 3D graphics had changed a lot of what gamers expected from their gaming experiences. "We got a big push out with *Stronghold 2* from Take Two to the extent that they commissioned a bunch of those big fibreglass mannequins," recalls Simon, adding that they were shipped across Europe as centrepieces in store windows. But those challenges that the team faced were a little too much, and again *Stronghold 2* did not perform as well as anyone hoped.

Despite the hugely favourable opinions of its modern-day fanbase, *Stronghold 2* received a mixed response critically. ▶

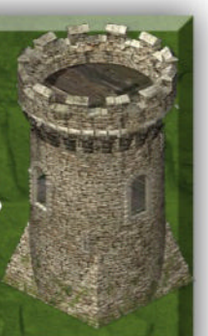
» [PC] The same AI opponents from the first game returned in *Crusader*, but this time you shared the map with them and could watch as they built their castle.

» [PC] *Stronghold Kingdoms* allows players to build up their castles and armies to join in a virtual feudal system of real-time warring against other players and factions.

» [PC] With a stronger split in military and economic gameplay, it was rare that you had to balance both in *Stronghold 2*.

» [PC] *Stronghold Legends* used the same engine as *Stronghold 2*, but with a fantastical setting – which fans didn't really click with.

Animal Warfare

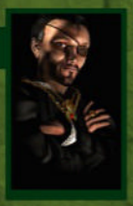


THE BEASTLY LORDS YOU'LL FACE OFF AGAINST IN STRONGHOLD

The Rat

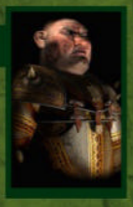
REAL NAME: Duc de Puce
Perhaps unsurprising, given his name, but the Rat is not a particularly formidable opponent. His castles are flawed to the point of ridicule and it doesn't take a master strategist to overcome his defences. Sometimes he'll even build stairs on the *outside* of his castle walls. Defending is pretty simple too, since he tries to regularly rush you with inexpensive but weak light units.

The Snake



REAL NAME: Duc Beauregard
The Snake is far more charming than his comrades, but his greed is his downfall. He favours units that are fast and quick to produce so he can strike quickly, but never really advances to the more expensive units. He skimps on his castle designs, too, though his towers are typically crammed with archers that need to be dealt with first.

The Pig



REAL NAME: Duc Truffe
This brutish and bloated lord runs his castles in much the same vein. His castles are blocky, bulky affairs that can usually be overcome with minimal preparation, though he does have a solid economy and can usually rebuild quite easily if you don't finish him off straight away. His own sieges are just as brutish and lack deftness, though they can be quite overwhelming.

The Wolf

REAL NAME: Duc Volpe
As a mastermind tactician, the Wolf is the lord you'll struggle against the most. His castles are fortresses with sprawling walls and archer-filled towers, all with a robust economy that keeps his army supplied. When it comes to his attacks, the Wolf uses the full range of units available, favouring the stronger, more armoured units with a wide range of siege units. Be wary when you're facing the Wolf, he's a formidable opponent.

Welcome to my Crib

BUILD YOUR OWN IMPENETRABLE CASTLE

GATEHOUSE
1 The key entryway to your keep, and the best way to allow your gatherers and soldiers to move in and out of the castle without exposing yourself to enemies.

TOWERS
2 These are unsurprisingly crucial for your defences, but place them logically so that they will be most effective when filled with archers to shoot your enemies.

MOAT
3 The strongest defence you can build, since a moat either directs attackers to a heavily fortified entrance or forces them to fill in the moat which takes a lot of time.

WALLS
4 Early walls will be basic structures, but as you expand your castle you should learn to use walls to guide attacks with specific routes and additional wall layers.

PITCH
5 The most deadly defence a lord can have. Purposefully placed pitch can be set on fire, causing attackers to also be set on fire and take a lot of damage. Ouch!

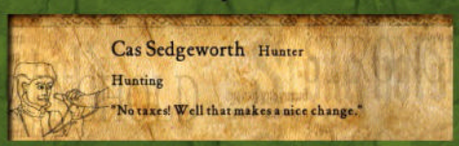
CROSSBOWMEN OR ARCHERS?
6 The answer? Both. The former deal more damage and can hit from further away, but take longer to load. Archers will help in the meantime.

KNIGHTS
7 If you see a siege is coming, it can be useful to have some knights ready to head out and deal some early damage to the encroaching enemies. Huzzah!

KILLING PITS
8 Clever placement of killing pits will help to thin the numbers of attackers as they approach your castle. It's definitely good to think about where you want to put them.

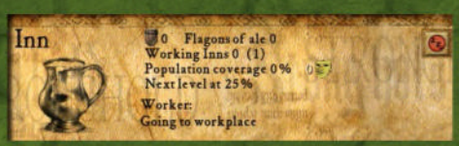
All That Glitters

HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL ECONOMY



TAX ON, TAX OFF

■ The single most important thing you can do in *Stronghold* is to consistently keep an eye on your popularity. When it's high, tax your citizens heavily. When it's low, reduce the tax again until it's back to a high rating. Rinse and repeat.



DRINK YOUR CARES AWAY

■ Ale production is the most important food produce you can generate since it'll strongly boost your popularity (for obvious reasons). Focussing on hops and from there ale production is the best thing you can do for every castle you build.

AN APPLE A DAY

■ Secondary to ale is apple production, which is the most effective way to feed your folk. When starting a new castle, let this be your priority with two to three orchards so that you have enough food to start growing your popularity.

The studio released *Stronghold: Legends* in 2006, a fantastical spin-off of the original game that had players controlling King Arthur, Siegfried Of Xanten and a vampiric Vlad The Impaler. 2008 saw a re-release of *Crusader* called *Extreme Edition*, but in both cases the games were rather poorly received. Hard times were ahead for Firefly, which had been developing an RPG called *Dungeon Hero* for Xbox 360 that would go on to be cancelled after years of development when the publisher went bankrupt.

During this period, however, the team had been working on something a little different, adapting the *Stronghold* concept into something more akin to a virtual mediaeval empire. "With *Stronghold Kingdoms*, what I wanted to do was to have a game where, in my head, your castle didn't go to sleep," says Simon. "You didn't stop the game, the castle is more of a virtual world type of thing. We had basically thought that we would do it with the *Tribal Wars* model, but with a plus-plus sort of thing." This persistently online mediaeval world built around the castle sim features of *Stronghold* would go on to become the company's saving grace after releasing in 2009 thanks to a dedicated base that was heavily invested in its own society of warring factions and feudal power struggles.

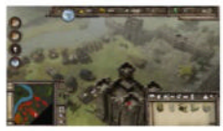
"We were doing *Stronghold 3* following on from the credit crunch," admits Simon of how the third game came about. "In 2008 we were furiously trying to figure out what to do, it was the low-point as a company for us. It was hard, we had been left owed a lot of money and so we had to scale back down to a core team." The solution was to sign a deal for *Stronghold 3*, which then got sold to another publisher and left Firefly accepting a contract that was less than ideal "because we needed to", says Simon. And because of those poor terms, *Stronghold 3* couldn't be the game that Firefly wanted it to be. "It wasn't quite ready to be released," says Paul, "but in the end of the day we were under extreme pressure to release it from the publisher. *Stronghold 3* is a real shame because there's definitely interesting ideas in there, but it was just that development was so hard that we never fully realised any of those features. I always think it's a little funny because it has this darker tone, and it kind of fits how the company was at the time."

Firefly worked hard to get *Stronghold 3* into a passable state post-release, but with the struggles behind it there was a light at the end of the tunnel. "Luckily we had *Kingdoms* and that was growing, and it would continue to grow to its peak around 2014," says Simon. "So we could see that if we could deal with *Stronghold 3*, then better times were ahead." On top of that, the industry had continued to grow in the meantime; PC gamers were once again relevant after the console-heavy era of the Noughties, and the release and ensuing popularity of Steam meant that smaller developers like Firefly could find their footing once more. The success of *Kingdoms* as well as the self-published HD releases of *Stronghold* and *Crusader* in 2012 gave Firefly renewed vigour and its next game would be released completely off its own back.

In returning to the desert, *Stronghold Crusader II* was a return to form for Firefly in 2014, bringing with it a very familiar and even nostalgic experience but through the veil of a modern strategy game. It reignited players' passion for the *Stronghold* series and restored Firefly Studios, and would ultimately enable the developer to go on to release *Stronghold: Warlords* in 2021, the first time the series stepped into an Asian setting. "I think we knew we had tapped into something that appealed to people," says Simon of the *Stronghold* brand, "it's a perennial thing and we've finally been proven right after 20 years when *Stronghold 1* still sells really well. I still get lots of mums, now, talking about their teenage sons playing the game. We're a complete hit with teenage boys from the age of 13 to about 63 is how we look at it."

As tumultuous as *Stronghold*'s history has been, there's no denying that it is in Firefly's blood. We might not know where the franchise will go in the future, but we can't imagine series' fans will let it rest for long. "We like doing these games and we want to try to do different things with it," says Simon. "We have a love for all things castles that I don't think has really been dimmed frankly."

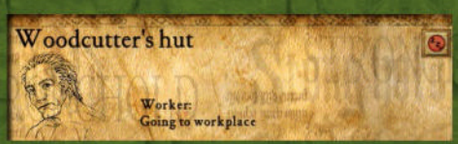
> "I STILL GET LOTS OF MUMS, NOW, TALKING ABOUT THEIR TEENAGE SONS PLAYING THE GAME"
> **Simon Bradbury**



» [PC] Mechanically *Stronghold 3* was a fairly sound continuation of the series, it just released with a number of problems and negativity.

» [PC] One of the new features of *Stronghold 3* were the night missions, with were typically used in more ambush or sneaky-style guerrilla levels.

» [PC] The most recent *Stronghold* game tried to expand on the classic gameplay with more of a grand strategy flavour to it.



WOOD YOU KINDLY?

As the primary construction material for a lot of the structures, having access to a large supply of wood is going to be crucial especially after an opposing siege. Iron is critical for success, but wood never stops being important.

FEUDAL CAPITALISM

Once you have a steady production chain of resources to a point that you have more than you need, sell off your excess so that your storage buildings are never kept at capacity. You can double rations too for a popularity boost.

DIVERSKINS

Jaws Unleashed

ALL YOU NEED IS KILL

» RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX » 2006 » APPALOOSA INTERACTIVE

Sometimes, when I'm playing a game I just want to be bad. In the Eighties that meant playing *Jack The Nipper* and causing a large amount of toddler-fuelled carnage, while the top-down shenanigans of *Grand Theft Auto* saw me mowing down innocent bystanders and plugging bad guys in the late-Nineties. When it came to the mid-Noughties, *Jaws Unleashed* was my go-to game and it's a shame it's not backwards compatible with the Xbox Series X (although I suppose *Maneater* now fills the fishy void where *Jaws Unleashed* once swam).

Created by the same studio that spawned the *Ecco The Dolphin* series, *Jaws Unleashed* shares numerous similarities with *Ecco The Dolphin: Defender Of The Future*. It's a much more entertaining game, though, mainly because you can eat or destroy anything that inhabits your watery domain. Swimmers can be pulled under the water and savaged without alerting nearby victims to your presence, you can chomp into seals as they frantically swim away from you, while boats can be smashed apart, causing their owners to spill out like popcorn.

It's tremendously satisfying running amok as a ferocious great white and the on-screen blood spilling becomes even more entertaining when you realise you can rip apart victims by frantically shaking the right stick back and forth. There's a surprisingly entertaining story that goes along with *Jaws Unleashed*'s high kill count, which places your shark in ever more outrageous scenarios, including a dramatic showdown with a giant squid and a tense swim through a minefield. Granted the controls can be a chore at times and you'll often find yourself battling the camera as much as the game's aquatic denizens, but it remains plenty of fun and I always like to return to it whenever I feel the need to blow off some steam.

» This month we review Capcom's remake of Resident Evil 4, go hunting for spirits in Project Zero: Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse, check out the remaster of GrimGrimoire and watch Apple TV's new movie about Tetris

» [PS5] The new parrying mechanic is superb and gives you a fighting chance against tougher opponents.

Resident Evil 4

CAPCOM BRINGS A KNIFE TO A GUNFIGHT

Retro Gamer Sizzler

INFORMATION

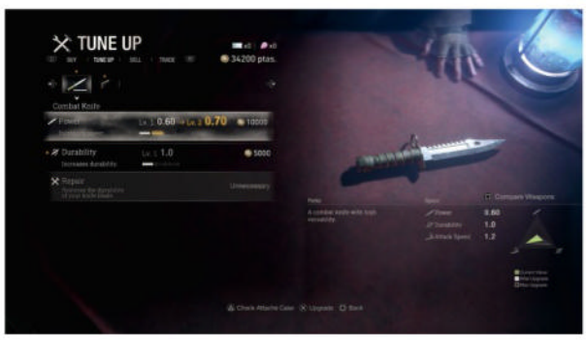
- **FORMAT REVIEWED:** PS5
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS4, PC, XBOX ONE, XBOX SERIES S/X
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £59.99
- **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- **DEVELOPER:** CAPCOM
- **PLAYERS:** 1

How do you improve on a game that many consider perfect? That's the task Capcom has given itself with its latest remake, and while it's not without its faults, it remains an excellent companion piece to the 2005 classic. Even if you've never played Capcom's game before you'll most certainly be aware of its heritage and how it reinvented both the *Resident Evil* franchise and the third-person action genre in general. This remake doesn't do that, but you'll be having such a good time you won't really care.

It's perhaps inevitable that Capcom's remake doesn't immediately impress in the same way its recent remakes of *Resident Evil 2* and *3* did – after all the original *Resident Evil 4* introduced many of the changes those two games greatly benefitted from. And yet, even if you're a long-time fan of *Resi 4* you'll still discover plenty new here as you explore the many creepy locations of Capcom's game.

While Leon S Kennedy is still on a mission to recover Ashley Graham, story beats are now quite different and characters won't necessarily act the same way they once did, meaning that many aspects of the plot feel fresh. The same goes for *Resident Evil 4*'s levels – while environments and locations will be instantly familiar, some have been pared back while others have been significantly expanded. Even many of the boss battles feel fresh, while some of the more frustrating elements from the original game have been massively modified (the QuickTime Events) or eliminated entirely.

Mechanically *Resident Evil 4* feels hugely different as well, with Leon being far lighter on his feet than he was in the 2005 game. *Resi 4*'s tank controls are a thing of



» [PS5] You'll need to constantly upgrade your knife in order to get the best out of it.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Capcom's *Resident Evil* arrived on Sony's PlayStation in 1996 and revitalised the survival horror genre. After several updates and sequels Capcom reinvented the genre again with the exceptional *Resident Evil 4*, a classic that is still inspiring the action games of today. This is the second time *Resident Evil 4* has been re-imagined as Armature Studio created a first-person VR release for Oculus Quest 2 in 2022.

PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

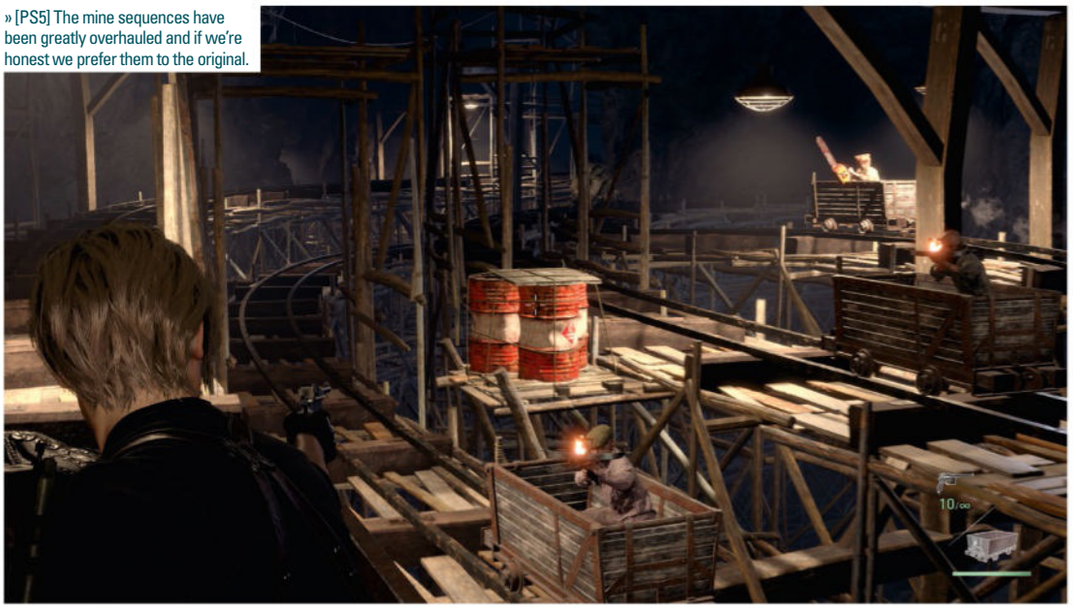
Raiden III X Mikado Maniax

I've had a lot of fun revisiting this and some of the new remixed tunes that have been included are absolutely banging.

NICK

Alice Dreams Tournament

I do love a good take on the *Bomberman* formula, and this one makes some very interesting use of the Dreamcast hardware.

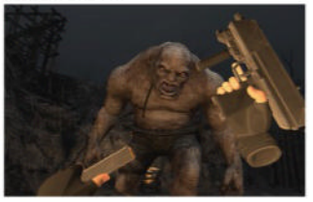


» [PS5] The mine sequences have been greatly overhauled and if we're honest we prefer them to the original.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
RESIDENT EVIL 4

▼ SOMETHING NEW
RESIDENT EVIL 4 VR



» [PS5] Boss fights were a huge part of *Resident Evil 4* and they remain just as memorable here.

the past and Leon can now move and shoot, duck and generally perform with far more athleticism than he did before. He's also a lot more resourceful than he was back in 2005 and he can now craft a variety of items, from bullets to grenades, meaning you should never run out of ammo.

Ashley has been greatly overhauled as well, and while there are still a couple of areas where she's problematic, generally she's far better behaved than she was in the original. Keep in mind though that the default controls annoyingly place her new commands on R3, which is easy to mess up in the heat of battle – swapping the control scheme (there are six available) eliminated these issues for us.

Another significant change is Leon's knife. It has a far more integral role now and can be used to perform stealth kills, parry attacks and immediately finish enemies when they're down, which dramatically intensifies the game's combat. It has limited durability though, so you'll need to constantly visit the Merchant to upgrade and restore it or pick up additional knives as you explore.

Speaking of the Merchant, the popular vendor is once again on hand to sell and buy items and upgrade your precious weapons, but it's now possible to trade items with him by handing over certain jewels. Said gems are earned by completing the numerous Requests that are dotted throughout the levels and while they're largely simple tasks like shooting a set number of medallions or retrieving a golden egg, they give you a good excuse to further explore the glorious-looking environments featured throughout the game.

» [PS5] Enemies are far more aggressive this time around so use your ammo wisely.

Capcom really has outdone itself here, even if fan-favourite The Mercenaries isn't immediately included (it's currently planned as free DLC). Newcomers are going to find a fast-paced action game stuffed with exciting setpieces, dramatic boss fights, gory kills and explorative combat, while veterans should be pleased with the numerous changes and welcome the new fighting mechanics that Leon's knife introduces. Not everything lands with the same gravity as it did with the original game, but if we're honest that's hardly surprising as *Resident Evil 4* essentially reinvented the wheel while its remake is happy to ensure it keeps spinning.

While it admittedly suffers from some tough difficulty spikes and occasional issues with Ashley, the 2005 release had these problems as well. Granted, this doesn't reinvigorate the game in the same way *Resident Evil 4 VR* did, but there's no denying that Capcom has managed to create one of the most exciting action games we've played for quite some time. ✱

In A Nutshell

It doesn't make the same great strides that the original did but *Resident Evil 4* remains a thrilling experience that should please newcomers and veterans alike.

» Score **91%**

» [PS5] This section was a real chore in the original game and it remains problematic in the remake.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Tetris

» **Buy it for:** £6.99 (monthly subscription) » **Buy it from:** Apple TV+

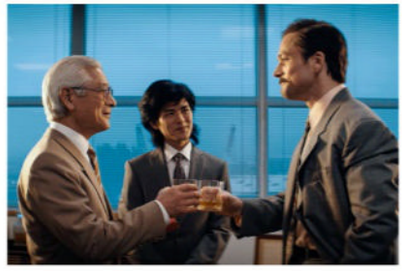
***Tetris* is one of the world's best-known videogames and the story of its inception has been told many times.** This latest offering from Apple TV+, which is directed by Jon S Baird and written by Noah Pink, delivers a tale that will not only cause the eyebrows of many gamers to rise completely off their faces but is likely to confuse non-gamers as much as it entertains them.

Rather than focus on Alexey Pajitnov, *Tetris*' creator, Baird's movie instead chooses to follow Henk Rogers (played by the ever-charming Taron Egerton) as he discovers *Tetris*, instantly recognises its appeal and struggles to obtain a publishing deal for it. *Tetris* is well-known for its messy publishing rights and while Pink does a decent job of untangling them it still leads to some confusing moments as new characters and corporations get introduced (often with a super-stylised 8-bit theme) and the playing field becomes even more crowded.

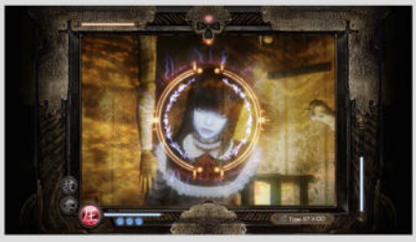
While many of the strands of Pink's story do feel greatly exaggerated (the huge presence of the KGB for example) *Tetris* nonetheless does a good job of keeping you entertained as its numerous rights owners fight over the coveted prize. Clearly inspired by the likes of *Succession* and the works of Aaron Sorkin (most notably *The Social Network*) *Tetris* does a surprisingly decent job of making people argue over videogame rights look interesting. This is largely down to Egerton who oozes charisma and shows the sheer lengths that Rogers will go to in order to succeed, but the likes of Toby Jones and Roger Allam who play Robert Stein and Robert Maxwell also add some much-needed gravitas.

It all feels a little incredulous at times and the film loses some of its momentum when Henk and Alexey (played by Nikita Yefremov) eventually start the friendship that would lead to them forming The Tetris Company together, but there's no denying it's a lot of fun at times.

» While *Tetris* does look at the creation of the game, its focus is clearly on the legal side of matters.



» Hiroshi Yamauchi (Togo Igawa) meets up with Henk Rogers (Taron Egerton) in what would prove to be a pivotal moment for Rogers.



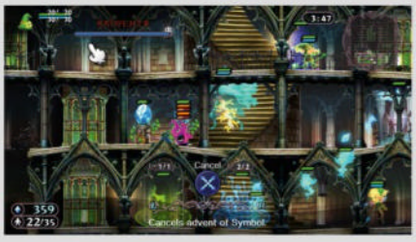
Project Zero: Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse

» **System:** Switch (tested) PS4, PS5, PC, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £39.99
» **Buy it from:** Online

Originally released as a Japan-only Wii exclusive in 2008, *Mask Of The Lunar Eclipse* has finally received an official Western release with rather mixed results. While there's no doubting the quality of its core story or the makeover that the game has received, non-fans may find the controls and slow sense of progression outdated. We'd argue that you stick with it though, because while *Mask* does indeed feel dated (with a few performance issues on the Switch version) there's still much to enjoy. Snapping ghosts with the Camera Obscura is still as entertaining as ever, while the story is one of the franchise's best.

DARRAN JONES

» Score **72%**



GrimGrimoire: OnceMore

» **System:** Switch (version tested), PS4, PS5
» **Buy it for:** £44.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Vanillaware's fantasy real-time strategy game first appeared on the PS2 in 2007, and time hasn't dulled its unique appeal one bit. The developer has always been known for its excellent 2D art and the transition to HD displays has been handled superbly, while gameplay has been tweaked with the addition of new Grand Magic abilities and a skill tree to develop your units. Unfortunately the lack of visual variety in the battlefields was a weak point of the original and it hasn't really been addressed here, and the English voice acting isn't the strongest, but overall this is a solid update that has clearly been handled with great care.

NICK THORPE

» Score **83%**

Tiny Troopers: Global Ops

» **System:** PS5 (version tested), PS4, Switch, PC
» **Buy it for:** £15.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

This twin-stick shooter is a little bit like *Cannon Fodder*, with your heavily outnumbered mercenary squad undertaking dangerous missions with no small dose of humour. However, the balance leans more to arcade action than strategy, with combo-based scoring mechanics and the limited ability to revive downed allies, and you'll want to head back to HQ between missions in order to acquire better weaponry. The scenery sometimes obscures your view of the action, bullets occasionally travel through buildings and the funny voice clips during the action soon become very repetitive. Still, there's enough variety in the main missions for fans of the style to have a good time.

NICK THORPE

» Score **78%**

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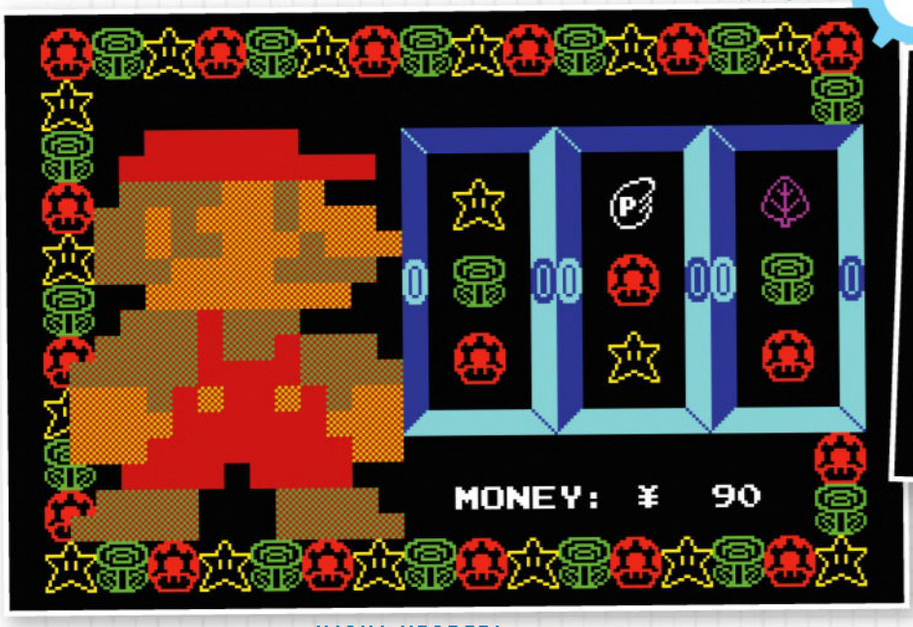
THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



<INTRO> FIRSTLY, AN APOLOGY FOR THE PROBLEMS WITH THE DUNGEON & SOULS REVIEW IN ISSUE 244 – THE FULL REVIEW IS REPRINTED BELOW. AND IF SPECTRUM FANS ENJOY THAT GAME, THEY SHOULD ALSO CHECK OUT OUR COVERAGE OF THE CSSCGC 2022 – AND THE DELIGHTFUL SPECTRUM-STYLE BEEP'S ESCAPE. 16-BIT FANS ARE CATERED FOR BY OUR CHAMPION CODER AND PROCESSING PREVIEW, AND THERE'S SO MUCH HAPPENING IN OUR NEWS BYTES. ENJOY MORE HOMEBREW AND SEE YOU NEXT TIME! </INTRO>

<MAIN HEADER>

SPECTRUM SILLINESS

<INTRO> THE COMP.SYS.SINCLAIR CRAP GAME COMPETITION 2022, WHERE BEST IS WORST, WAS ORGANISED BY ANDY JENKINSON AND RECEIVED OVER 40 ENTRIES </INTRO>

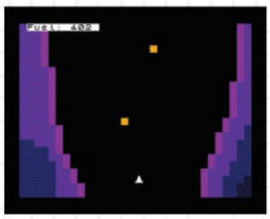
<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] THE SATIRICAL BUNTER'S LAST STAND FOR THE ALWAYS-POPULAR SPECTRUM WAS CREATED BY 'ANONYMOUS DOWNING STREET SOURCES,' ALLEGEDLY. --->

<BODY> **Andy's hilarious opening ceremony was coded in BASIC, "To demonstrate just how rubbish something could be to be considered worthy of entering – and to test the website.** I'm pleased to have had genuine attempts to make entertaining games, experimental programming showcases as well as zeitgeisty jokes and political statements hidden in the guise of crap."

Each entry received an entertaining review from Andy. "My reviews are like very verbose rejection letters that disappointed bedroom programmers might have received. I really hope people enjoy the competition and 'get' its ethos. I think of it as a safe space for beginners, where people can try things without pressure – like turning the clock back to 1983 and imagining what might have been submitted to those software houses who advertised in the back of magazines."

Ioannis Marinidis (Firelord) uploads his work to plirof.itch.io and had multiple entries. "I always try to have a backstory in the manual with a silly story or scientific explanation. Some of my 2022 entries were made in my attempt to learn game design tools." *Top Gun 2: MaveRick Dangerous*, simulating a dogfight in a text adventure, was written with Adventuretron – and he also uses the zxplay.org IDE. "The main goal of all my entries is to give a smile. My games have been published with the label Firelord Quality Games so that the public knows they are guaranteed quality. For 2023 I already have some entries half-ready." As a teacher, Ioannis says, "I would like to ask the competition host to accept entries of a school class as a subcategory. I believe that the kids will have fun making simple basic games for such a competition."

Jamie Bradbury was the 'loser' with *Yoyo's Revenge* and thus became the 2023 host. "I like to get a core gameplay idea as quickly as possible,



FIVE FAVOURITES

GRUMPHERS
(Jim Waterman, Lambda 8300 16K)

<Made for the Hong Kong-built ZX81 clone, the title *Grumphers* does not fit a single-screen racing game! />

SPECTRUM COMPUTING HAS GOT LOVE BUGS
(Robert Morrison, ZX Spectrum)

<Requiring the Kempston Mouse, this game has brilliant presentation with its 1-bit graphics of Internet memes. />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

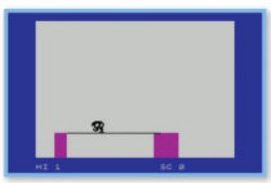
<!--- TAKEN 35 YEARS APART, THESE PHOTOS SHOW ORGANISER ANDY JENKINSON IS STILL LEARNING... --->

<!--- [ENTRANTS IOANNIS MARINIDIS (FIRELORD, LEFT) AND JAMIE BRADBURY (JBIZZEL, RIGHT) --->

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] LIA THOMAS SWIMMING CHALLENGE BY EQUINOX DREW INSPIRATION FROM BUTTON BASHER TRACK & FIELD. --->

and the development comes through playtesting and iteration. *Yoyo's Revenge* was something my nine-year-old son came up with, the hero was chased by monsters and could only fight back after finding a magical yo-yo. I made a quick mock-up and found that I really enjoyed getting revenge. I have lots of ideas, but it's a special kind that actually gets made. I have to see clearly in my mind how to make it. Sometimes a crap game takes half an hour to make, sometimes it takes weeks of late nights." The 2023 entries so far are at Jamie's itch.io page – jbizzel.itch.io – but as host, he cannot take part. "I have several ideas bubbling away. I am also working on Cambridge Computer Z88 projects this year, as I want to improve my understanding of Clive's last computer." you can check out all the 2022 games and Andy's reviews by visiting bit.ly/csscgc-2022 </BODY>

<INTRO> OUR FAVOURITE ENTRIES FROM 2022'S COMPETITION </INTRO>



STICKY HORACE

(ZXKerl, ZX Spectrum)

<The overall 'winner', as they put it, was Sticky Horace with a very familiar blue sprite pole vaulting his way across varying-size gaps. />

ERROR REPORT ROULETTE

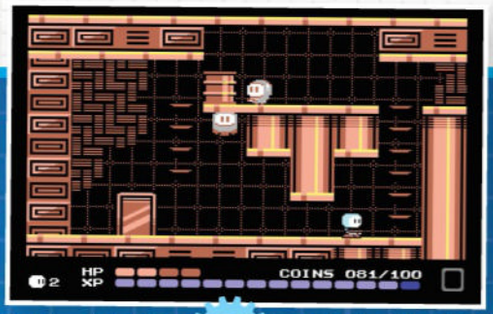
(Jim Waterman, Various)

<Jim's unusual title "would have been improved by being an actual game, rather than an encyclopaedic exploration of error messages", says Andy. />

10D BATHROOM DESIGN

(Firelord, ZX Spectrum)

<"The manual contains scientific explanations of why you are more creative in your bathroom!" says Firelord of this utility/game. />



NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Apple II:** Lee Fastenau released a brilliant conversion of *Game Boy Tetris*. You can find it at bit.ly/gbtetris-apple />

<**Aquarius:** Check out new release *Aquatris* from Christophe Possamai – bit.ly/aquatris />

<**C16:** *Sir Knight 16K* is an updated version of the Plus/4 game, fitting into 16K but with extra levels and features. Give it a try by visiting c64mark.itch.io/sir-knight-c16 />

<**C64:** Knifegrinder's debut game is the superb *Lester (above)* a Metroidvania-style offering with a cute robot – inspired by the MSX game *Ghost*. Get it at knifegrinder.itch.io/lester />

<**MSX:** The 2023 coding competition is underway at msxdev.org – the theme is Freestyle, and the deadline is 14 October. />

<**NES:** Haplo has converted his light-based puzzle game *Tenebra*, you can buy it by visiting h4plo.itch.io/tenebra />

<**PET:** Jimbo's latest is *PET Panic!*, inspired by the classic arcade game *Space Panic*. Give it a whirl by visiting jimbo.itch.io/pet-panic />

<**PICO-8:** The brilliant RTS *Age Of Ants* is inspired by *Age Of Empires II*, as you gather resources and breed new ants. Check it out at bit.ly/ants-pico8

Matt Sutton's brilliant *Terra Nova Pinball* evokes memories of the classic *Pinball Dreams*. It's available at bit.ly/tnpinball-pico8 />

<**Saturn:** The 28th anniversary Game Competition hosted by Emerald Nova Games has finished, with 30 entries across three categories – Original Games/Hacks, Patches & Translations/Utilities. Results should be available soon at bit.ly/saturn28 />

<**ZX Spectrum:** Dr Titus released *Treasure Island Dizzy (Extended Edition 2023)*, featuring 20 new rooms, new objects and a fix for the infamous snorkel problem. Find out how it plays by heading to bit.ly/treasuredizzy2023 />

CHAMPION CODER

SAMUEL BLANCHARD

<INTRO> ST FANS CAN LOOK FORWARD TO A PROMISING PLATFORM RPG FROM THIS FRENCH CODER. </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: FRANCE WEBSITE: BIT.LY/MIRACLEBOY-FB FORMAT: ATARI ST PREVIOUS GAME: CRAZYZONE (GAME BOY COLOR) WORKING ON: MIRACLE BOY IN DRAGON LAND (ATARI ST) />

WHAT INSPIRED MIRACLE BOY IN DRAGON LAND?

<*Wonder Boy In Monster Land*, my favourite Master System game. I feel much closer to Japanese games than to American games. I'm a fan of Shigeru Miyamoto's games, Sega games *Fantasy Zone* and *Psycho Fox*, and the *Wonder Boy* saga. I'm going to keep the game universe and mythology, but it will be closer to a *Zelda* game. The management of magic is different, and there are minigames in the form of puzzles to be solved. The scenario will be darker while keeping the colours typical of Japanese graphics./>

<!--- "MIRACLE BOY IN DRAGON LAND IS THE GAME I WISH I HAD DEVELOPED WHEN I WAS 16," SAYS SAMUEL. --->

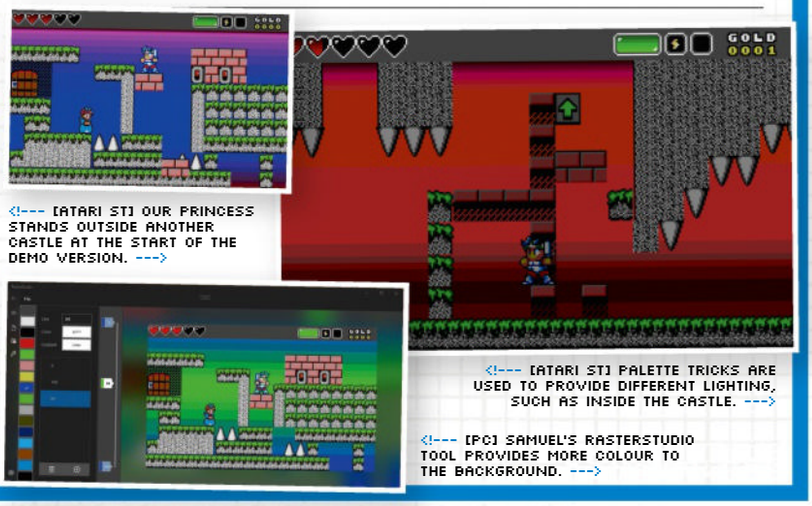
WHAT IS YOUR DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT LIKE?

<With Visual Code and a plug-in for 68000 assembler. I draw or adapt graphics using Aseprite and maps are supported by Tiled. Rasters are generated using RasterStudio, an application developed specifically for the game (available on Microsoft Store). I found a way to do smooth scrolling on ST, without Blitter to be compatible with as many machines as possible, by simply using precomputed tiles.

I developed an XML macro language to control the interactions of the hero with his environment. I use a C# program to transform all this data into compressed binary files or source files. I use VASM to compile into an executable. I test and debug with the STEEM SSE emulator. Its creator is also easily reachable, and that is an undeniable plus (thanks to him)./>

WHEN WILL IT BE FINISHED?

<I think another one to two years. I'm in no rush. My goal is to keep the pleasure I have in coding, otherwise, I would likely stop. I am supported by Marcus 'Marcer' Lindberg for music, and we will hire a graphic designer so the game has its own identity. I greet the entire MBIDL Facebook community (linked above), which gives me great moral support. A big thank you to Rati/Overlanders and Vincent Rivière who are always ready to answer my questions. Also, hello to the Atari Forum./>



<!--- [ATARI ST] OUR PRINCESS STANDS OUTSIDE ANOTHER CASTLE AT THE START OF THE DEMO VERSION. --->

<!--- [ATARI ST] PALETTE TRICKS ARE USED TO PROVIDE DIFFERENT LIGHTING, SUCH AS INSIDE THE CASTLE. --->

<!--- [PC] SAMUEL'S RASTERSTUDIO TOOL PROVIDES MORE COLOUR TO THE BACKGROUND. --->

DATABURST

DUNGEON AND SOULS

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM (48K) CREDITS: HYE SSUN ENTERTAINMENT PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/DUNGEON-AND-SOULS />

<BODY> **This mixes an old-school dungeon explorer with elements from *Dark Souls*.** There are four character classes to choose from – knight, paladin, swordsman and wizard – affecting your starting stats. These are strength, dexterity, intelligence, vitality, and endurance. Entering the dungeon, your view is shown in first-person with walls and other objects visible as you explore. On each procedurally generated level, there is a bonfire where you can seek refuge. Here you can restore health or level-up (improving your stats) by spending Souls. Potions can also be used to restore health. Encountering the blacksmith allows you to buy, sell and forge weapons, you can pray at statues, and run into enemies to defeat. Combat moves the action to a simple overhead view. To attack an enemy you must move into it, *Ys*-style, and dodge backwards to avoid attacks. Souls are awarded for defeating an enemy. Finding the ladder allows you to descend to the next, tougher level (but you cannot return). It needs patience for the slow pace, and the enemy encounters are repetitive – with limited graphics and heavy reliance on timing. But for something written in 48K BASIC, this is worth trying for a clever Spectrum experience as it has plenty of depth to its dungeons. </BODY>

SCORE: 79%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

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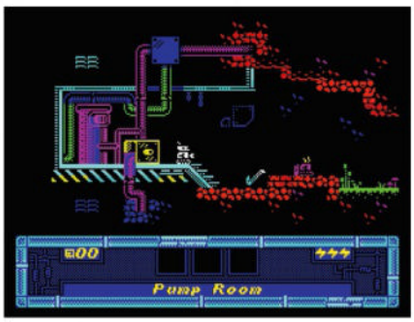
REVENGE OF TRASMOZ

<INFO FORMAT: AMSTRAD CPC CREDITS: VOLCANO BYTES PRICE: DIGITAL TBC/PHYSICAL PRE-ORDER FROM €27 WEB: VOLCANOBYTES.ITCH.IO/, POLYPLAY.XYZ />

<BODY> **The curse of Trasmoz has been broken, but Mutanim is plotting his revenge!** One or two players must descend through the Cemetery, Catacombs and Hidden Temple to defeat him. In each area, defeated enemies drop Orbs, used to light a candle. When all candles are lit, play moves on to the next of 12 levels. The single-screen playfields wrap around at the edges, making for very tactical play. Take too long and Mutanim will appear to chase you. Treasure chests award extra points and bonus lives can be found. This is great fun with excellent graphics and sound. Get a friend to help you and it's even better. We were left wanting more levels and variety in play, however. </BODY>

SCORE: 86%



BEEP'S ESCAPE

<INFO FORMAT: STEAM (WINDOWS/MAC/LINUX WITH STEAMOS) CREDITS: LITTLE MARTIAN GAMES PRICE: £8.50 WEB: BIT.LY/BEEPS-STEAM />

<BODY> **Robot Beep must escape a junk-filled planet in this *Dizzy*-style adventure.** Objects solve puzzles and batteries are scavenged for extra lives. Guard bots, water and toxic spills are among the hazards that cost Beep a life, while circuit boards boost your completion rate. There are multiple difficulty settings, a CRT filter, and the clever option to switch off the 'colour clash'. The graphics have a colourful Spectrum style, with gameplay to match and a cute chiptune as you explore. Craig Smith is even planning a Spectrum Next conversion. </BODY>

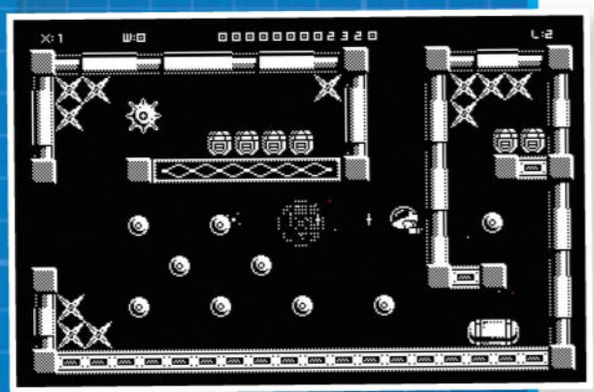
SCORE: 85%

PROCESSING

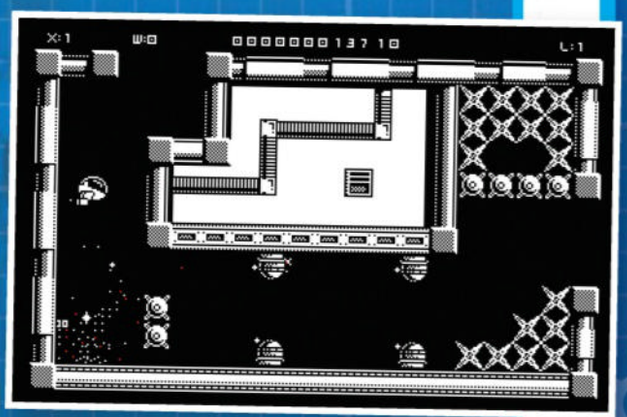
<INTRO> MIXING CYBERNOID AND ROBOTRON, THALAMUS INTERACTIVE'S STYLISH 1-BIT WONDER CECCONOID IS HEADING TO AMIGA </INTRO>

<BODY> **"I made the music for the original PC version," explains DJ H0ffman (Ian Ford).** "When I was looking for a new Amiga project, I approached Gareth Noyce to see if he would be happy for me to port it. He's been really helpful when I've raised questions about mechanics and has been playtesting parts of the game to make sure everything feels right."

The game's known for its particle effects – achieved here by using four bitplanes and triple buffering. "Emoon/The Black Lotus designed a system which used the blitter to generate self-modifying code for drawing and highly optimised the update process. I added an adaptive mode – when the game overruns a frame, it throttles the particle counts. It means gameplay still feels really fluid even on low-spec Amigas." A modern touch is achievements that 'pop up'. "One of my favourite tricks is driving the sprites from the copper. The achievement and pause overlays work in this mode." With a C64 version also underway, this year will be a blast. </BODY>



<!--- [AMIGA] "THE NUMBER OF COLLISION DETECTION SYSTEMS WHICH ARE IN PLAY IS PRETTY VAST," SAYS DJ HOFFMAN. --->



» [Game Boy Advance] Games like *Advance Wars* made Darran fall in love with strategy RPGs.

REVISITING THE GAME BOY ADVANCE

The team look back at Nintendo's portable marvel

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

» [Game Boy Advance] *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* is a strategy gem.

The Game Boy Advance was a significant upgrade over the original Game Boy and cemented Nintendo's vice-like grip on the handheld market. Join Tim, Darran and Nick as they revisit the popular handheld.

DARRAN

What's your first memory of the Game Boy Advance?

TIM

Finding one in my drawer when I started on *Cube*. I was like, "Is this for me?" Then someone said, "No. And it's broken."

NICK

My cousin got one in the summer of 2001. Mostly, I remember *Ready 2 Rumble Boxing: Round 2* being not so great, and struggling to see the action on that awful screen.

DARRAN

I got mine in 2002 with *Castlevania*, *Golden Sun* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* and I remember the screen being lousy. It's apparently why so many of the early games had such gaudy palettes as it made them easier to see. Did anyone else agree with the assessment that it was a portable SNES?

> "I got mine in 2002 with Castlevania, Golden Sun and Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2"
> DARRAN JONES

NICK

I never saw it like that, to be honest. I played a couple of follow-ups to SNES games like *Metroid Fusion* and *F-Zero: GP Legend*, but very rarely any actual SNES conversions.

TIM

Yeah, graphics-wise anyway.

DARRAN

I had a lot of games like *Donkey Kong Country*, *Super Mario World* and *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and the thing that always made the claim fall flat for me was the poor-quality sound that the GBA was saddled with. Does anyone have any essential games for the handheld?

NICK

Oh, plenty! *Advance Wars 2* was one of the first games I got for the system and I spent hours on it. I loved *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* and *Gunstar Future Heroes*, both from Treasure, and *Pokémon LeafGreen* was a lovely way to revisit one of my favourite adventures.

TIM

Personally, *Final Fantasy IV*. I spent one Christmas playing it on a GBA SP in one hand and a glass of whiskey in the other. Drunken *Final Fantasy*! Oh and *Pokémon Emerald*, but I had to review that as well.

DARRAN

I think the GBA is where I fell in love with strategy RPGs. I've still got the *Fire Emblem* and *Advance Wars* games, I enjoyed *Onimusha Tactics* at the time and I clocked over 200 hours on *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* after I put my back out. What did you think of the GBA SP?

» [Game Boy Advance] *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* is the first game in the series to feature retro tracks.

NICK
I loved the front-lit screen, hated the lack of a headphone jack. I'm really fond of it though – I got a blue one for my birthday in 2003, and then won a silver one from spong.com about six months later.

DARRAN
I forgot about the lack of a headphone jack! I remember all the funky coloured versions of it and I spent over £220 on the Japan-only *Boktai* edition, only to smash the screen a few days later when I took it on a press trip, got drunk and sat on it. Did you like your GBA SP, Tim?

TIM
Fantastic little machine. I eventually nabbed *Cube*'s one when the magazine was closed down and still have it today. Might fire it up later and see what games I've still got for it. And then I took the Micro one as well, but sold it later – it was way too small for me.

DARRAN
I had a cool little Micro as well but ended up selling it to Drew so I could buy *RIGS* on PSVR. Didn't you get a cheap Micro at one point, Nick?

NICK
I got mine for about £17 a year after it came out, which was really great. I got an even better bargain later on though – a boxed Game Boy Player with the disc for 99p. Did you guys ever spend much time with that peripheral?

TIM
Yep, used it a good number of times on *Cube* playing the likes of *Four Swords, WarioWare,* that *Pac-Man Vs* game and, of course, the game that made me fall asleep in the games room – *Pokémon Colosseum*.

DARRAN
I remember being disappointed with the resolution at the time

» [Game Boy Advance] Lots of great SNES ports were often saddled with rather weak audio.

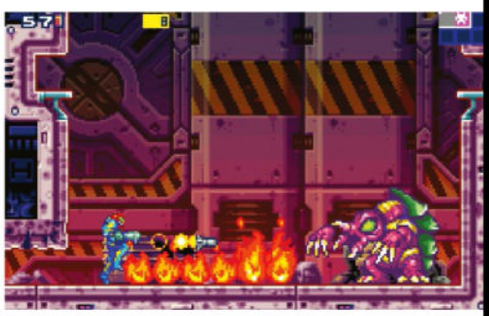
so I got rid of it as it was so blurry to look at. I purchased a modded Spice GameCube with matching controller and Game Boy Player a while back and it's been hacked to output at 240P so everything looks great. It's insane how much they actually sell for now.

NICK
Blimey, isn't it? I saw a boxed *Metroid: Zero Mission* in CeX for £150 the other day, and apparently they'd sell my copy of *Pokémon LeafGreen* with the wireless adapter for the same. Combined with the high chance of getting fakes, it's really put me off expanding my collection.

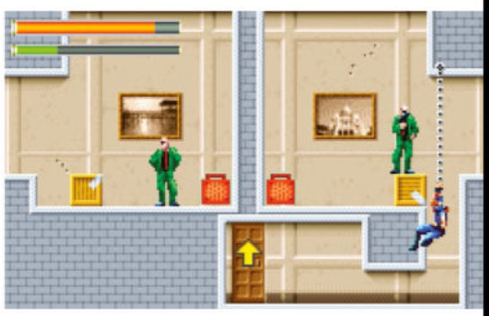
DARRAN
If you want all three *Castlevania* games you'll have no change from £500 and *The Minish Cap* now goes for over £100, which is madness. I also massively regret selling my copy of *Ninja Cop*. Have you got any carts hiding in the back of your cupboard, Tim? You could be sitting on a small fortune.

TIM
Not much. I took a load of stuff to GameStation to sell in 2009. Curse 2009-Tim and his inability to secure his financial future with GBA games!

» [Game Boy Advance] Several *Pokémon* games exist on Nintendo's handheld and they're all expensive to buy now.



» [Game Boy Advance] Darran reviewed *Metroid Fusion* for *games™* back in the day, awarding it 8/10.



» [Game Boy Advance] Darran has owned *Ninja Cop* twice and sold it both times. He's an idiot.

READERS REACT

What's your favourite Game Boy Advance game?

Gunbuster
It has to be *Hajime No Ippo: The Fighting*, not just the best arcade-style boxing game on the GBA, but possibly of all time. It's criminal that it was never released in the West when crappier *Ippo* games were!

Mordi
Ninja Five-O. Great 2D action game, though it flew under the radar and nobody bought it.

LiToneUP
Sonic Advance 2. It captures the feeling of the original games, but with updated graphics and sound, plus adds a few extra game modes.

Ben Wilson
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance. I'd never played the original *Final Fantasy Tactics*, but the gameplay had me hooked almost instantly. I remember a colleague at work playing it on an emulator on his work PC for almost six hours... then forgetting to save and watching in horror as it crashed.

Pedro G
Astro Boy: Omega Factor is, simply put, one of the most fantastic 2D action games ever created. Its developers, Treasure, managed to include all the aspects that have made them an icon.

NukaClipse
Zoids Legacy. It has got some minor issues here and there but it is a damn fine game to play, especially for a Zoids fan.

CrazyGroupTrio
Iridion 3D. I think it was a launch title, or at least very early, and it blew my mind at the time. It has a *Star Fox* feel and has a banger soundtrack.

Steve McCaskill
Mario Kart: Super Circuit. To squeeze something so playable and visually impressive into that cartridge remains a technical wonder to this day. It offered a glimpse of what was possible on a handheld.

Amperduke
Kuru Kuru Kururin – a GBA classic and very enjoyable just to pick up for a short period. Surprisingly the game hasn't been ported to any other console.

Peter Taylor
Pokémon Emerald. A real high point in the series, and was certainly the best title in the franchise when it came out. Impressive, varied music, a main storyline that mattered, in addition to even more Pokémon to catch.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST
"This is the greatest *Zelda* title ever released."
AMOUNT PAID: $60
FINAL FANTASY III
"My favourite of the earlier *Final Fantasy* games and it's still amazing."
AMOUNT PAID: $60

RPG HEAVEN

Our latest collector has an RPG collection that will floor you

BIO

NAME:
Frank Schwartztrauber, The RPG Guy

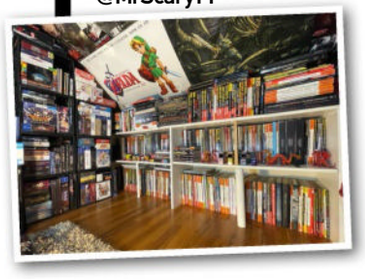
LOCATION:
Des Moines, Iowa, USA

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£100,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
SNES

FAVOURITE GAME:
Final Fantasy XII

TWITTER:
@MrScaryTT



We are big fans of focussed collections and Frank Schwartztrauber's is very impressive. Dedicated to role-playing games, it's a collection of considerable size (2,264 at last count) and started over 30 years ago. "I started collecting probably around 1990 after *Final Fantasy* came out for the NES," Frank says. "I really didn't make a conscious decision about it, I just liked to keep all of the items that came with the physical games. Then my hunger grew to play more console RPGs as I fell in love with the genre. Mostly because of the in-depth character progression and the stories."

While Frank remains a massive fan of the series that got him into collecting, he does feel it has lost its way in more recent years. "*Final Fantasy* is the series I prefer, or at least used to prefer the most, back when it was more turn-based," he says. "They're just higher-quality games, with state-of-the-art graphics, great stories and quite lengthy. I do wish *Final Fantasy* would get a little bit more back to its roots." Aside from collecting RPGs, Frank also likes to pick up the strategy guides that accompany them. "When I play an RPG I'm very much a completionist as much as I possibly can be, and guides really help you find information that you would probably never find on your own," he admits. "Then it just became fun to collect the guides themselves, as the prices started going crazy."

He's not wrong. RPGs, alongside shmups, are one of the priciest genres to collect for and Frank has his own ideas as to why this might be. "I think JRPGs are expensive because so many extras came with the games and it makes them hard to find complete," he explains. "Also, that's really where the console role-playing game actually started. So there's a lot of nostalgia there. I think a lot of people played those games when they were younger and didn't keep them in great condition and now want them again. The *Pokémon* games for instance."

With Frank being such a big fan of the genre, we were wondering if he collected games to play and whether he was interested in collecting different variants of his favourite titles. "I collect RPGs to play, although some are just for collecting that I don't open," he offers. "If I really want to play the game, I'll buy a spare copy of it sometimes or download it if available. I definitely collect variants of games. Different covers, collector editions etc. I have one game where I have six different covers for it."

Due to the high prices that RPGs now tend to go for, Frank is somewhat cautious when we asked him if the genre he was so passionate about was a good one to currently collect for. "To be honest, I'm not sure that you could start a similar collection without spending an insane amount of money. The prices of games have just gone nuts in the last few years," he admits. "If you're going to start, start with one of the newer generations and work your way back, always being on the lookout for some of the older titles at a decent price. It's definitely going to be expensive to complete a set."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

FINAL FANTASY XII
"This is the game that I keep going back to, even now."
AMOUNT PAID: $70

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

EARTHBOUND

■ "I bought this upon release. I didn't know at the time that it would be the most expensive game that I own."

PAID: $70

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

TOMB RAIDER II

If you're after a PAL PlayStation copy of Lara's second adventure you shouldn't have to pay more than **£12** for it. A big box PC edition costs a similar amount, while the Sold Old variant sells for under **£3.**

RICK DANGEROUS

If you fancy revisiting Core's first game you'll find it on Amstrad, Spectrum, C64 and Atari ST from **£10.** The Amiga version is far more expensive, with complete copies fetching as much as **£110.**

SENTINEL RETURNS

PAL PlayStation copies of this fun update top out at **£21.** If you want the US version you'll be paying as much as **£45** for it.

AIR RESCUE

The Master System version of Sega's arcade game is still relatively cheap, rarely selling for more than **£15** if it's in complete condition.

ZOOL

Despite the popularity of Gremlin's iconic Amiga game, prices for *Zool* are still low. Big box versions of the game range from **£3** to **£20** depending on how complete they are.

GAME OVER

The Spectrum version of Dinamic's rock-hard game should cost no more than **£20** if you fancy a challenge.

HEROQUEST

The Amiga adaptation of MB's popular board game can reach prices of **£50** in exceptional condition, but **£25** is far more typical.

JAWS UNLEASHED

If your Xbox is modded to play NTSC games then you can get *Jaws Unleashed* for **£15** (not including postage). Otherwise you're stuck with the more expensive PAL version which usually sells for **£55.**

HOW MUCH?!

RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN

We know this spin-off is becoming increasingly more expensive, but even we were shocked to see a copy sell for **£597.22** recently.

Prices correct at time of print

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

ONE DAY IN STROUD

Nick recalls his first retro event in years

I've often told the story of how I first met Darran at CGE:UK 2005 in Croydon, when he was still working on *games™* and I was on my summer holiday from college. Retro-gaming events were relatively rare in the UK at the time, and I relished the chance to buy some games and play some rare machines, but I was primarily there to meet up with some fellow *Sonic* fans. I've attended a number of events since then, but until recently the last one I'd been to was Play Expo London in 2018. I'd become complacent – it was very easy to just say "maybe next time" until the pandemic came along and nobody quite knew when those kinds of events would return.

Enter our long-time contributor Paul Drury and *The Ted Dabney Experience*, the podcast he co-hosts with Tony Temple and Richard May. Paul very kindly invited me along to a talk event the team had arranged, and it was an easy offer to accept – I knew the podcast crew would have some interesting stories, and despite all of our shared years on the magazine, I'd never actually met Paul. As a bonus the event took place at the Retro Collective in Stroud, a venue that I'd wanted to visit for some time, comprising RMC's The Cave and the Arcade Archive.

One thing I quickly learned is that if you're planning to visit, it's best to avoid Sundays if you're using public transport – there are no Sunday buses and the train station is a few miles away. Those troubles were forgotten as soon as I started chatting to Alex, who runs the Arcade Archive section of the venue, as his passion for what he does is obvious. After a bit of a chat with more familiar faces among the attendees, I spent a little while playing the arcade games and that was where Paul joined me for a spot of co-op action on *Bubble Bobble*, a game with so many secrets that it's impossible to keep track of them all.

Heading up to The Cave for the *Ted Dabney Experience* talk, I was very impressed by the array of machines that has been gathered there – it's not every day you see a Pioneer LaserActive, unless you're rather lucky. The collection of magazines was also lovely to see, with a Christmas issue of *Sonic The Comic* providing a particularly heavy dose of nostalgia for the year I insisted we used the tree ornament it came with. It's an impressive place and a chat with Neil, who many of you will be familiar with from the RMC YouTube channel, suggested that plans are afoot to expand it.

JOIN THE FUN

MORE INFORMATION ON THE PARTIES RESPONSIBLE FOR A FUN EVENT

THE TED DABNEY EXPERIENCE
teddabneyexperience.com
The podcast now has over 30 episodes, with Paul, Tony and Richard interviewing well-known guests like Ed Logg and Walter Day, as well as lesser-known but still fascinating figures like Atari graphic designer Evelyn Seto. Give it a listen.

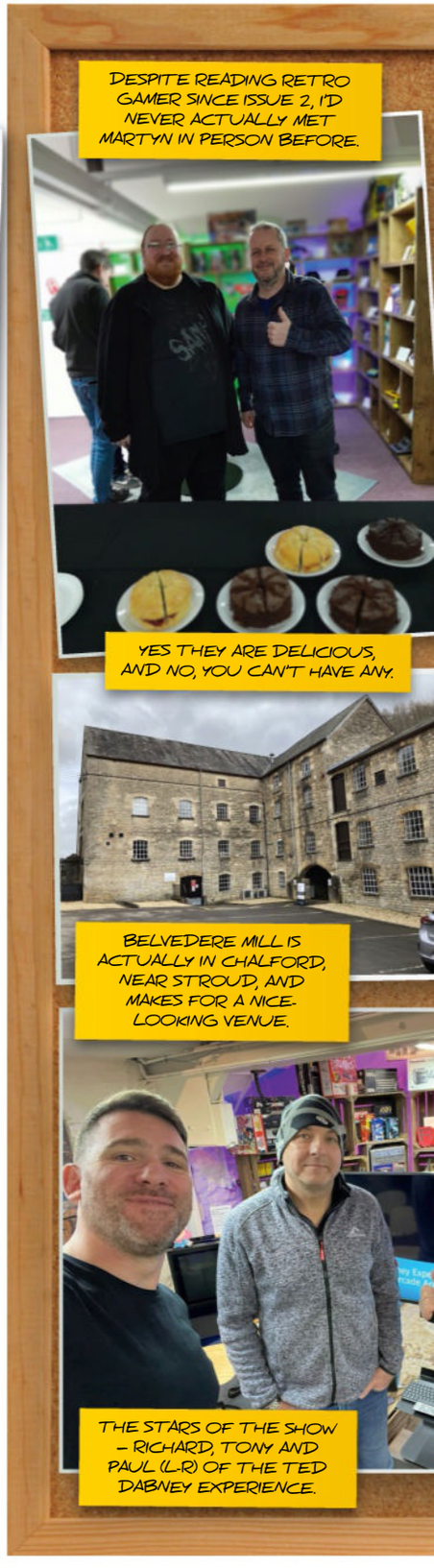
RETRO COLLECTIVE
retrocollective.co.uk
Comprising The Cave and Arcade Archive, this venue offers a range of vintage arcade games, computers and consoles to experience. Guests need to book sessions in advance – check the website for details of upcoming sessions and private hire.

Of course, the main event was the podcast chat and this didn't disappoint. The three hosts played some of their favourite clips from past episodes and shared additional anecdotes around them, and really emphasised their commitment to finding stories outside of the norm. One of my favourites was Doug Wismer's recollection of how the Canadian manufacturer Electrohome came to supply CRT monitors for Atari and other arcade gaming companies, simply by being able to respond rapidly and accommodate the need for colour displays.

Once the talk had concluded I ended up spending much more time chatting with other attendees, including Martyn Carroll – again, a key figure in **Retro Gamer**'s history who I'd never met in person. Soon enough it was nearly time to leave, and I realised that while I'd played quite a few games before the talk, I'd only played a single game of *Operation Wolf* since it finished. I had a quick play on *Silkworm*, *Frogger* and a couple of other games before it was time to start making the long journey back to Essex.

Some people might see that as a waste, but that's not a perspective I share. Don't get me wrong, I love the warm glow of a CRT and the authentic controls of original hardware, and both Arcade Archive and The Cave offer you ample opportunities to enjoy them. But as much as I love collecting and playing classic games, sharing my love for those games is just as big a part of the hobby for me – that's why I write about them, and that's why I consider the social aspect to be the most important part of retro-gaming events. Getting out there and being able to chat with like-minded people has done me a world of good, and I can't wait for another opportunity to do it all over again soon. ✱

> "It's not every day you see a Pioneer LaserActive"
>
> **NICK THORPE**


DESPITE READING RETRO GAMER SINCE ISSUE 2, I'D NEVER ACTUALLY MET MARTYN IN PERSON BEFORE.
YES THEY ARE DELICIOUS, AND NO, YOU CAN'T HAVE ANY.
BELVEDERE MILL IS ACTUALLY IN CHALFORD, NEAR STROUD, AND MAKES FOR A NICE-LOOKING VENUE.
THE STARS OF THE SHOW – RICHARD, TONY AND PAUL (L-R) OF THE TED DABNEY EXPERIENCE.

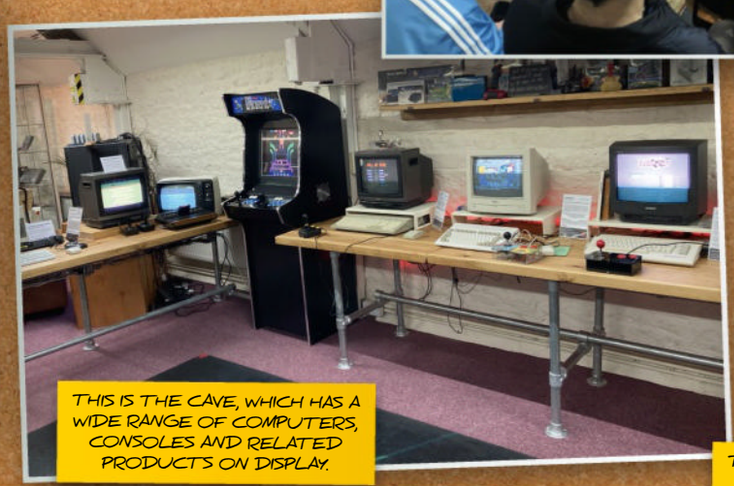
OUT RUN, OPERATION WOLF, DONKEY KONG AND ROBOTRON: 2084 – WE COULD SPEND HOURS HERE.

ARCADE ARCHIVE DOESN'T JUST HOST CLASSIC GAMES, BUT WORKS TO MAINTAIN AND RESTORE THEM.

A HEALTHY SELECTION OF MAGAZINES, INCLUDING ISSUES OF RETRO GAMER IN THE MUCH-LOVED BINDERS.

PAUL AND I GRAB A PHOTO TOGETHER, IN OUR NATURAL HABITAT – THE MAGAZINE LIBRARY.

PAUL LED THE ACTUAL TALK EVENT, AND MAKES FOR AN EXUBERANT AND PERSONABLE HOST.



THIS IS THE CAVE, WHICH HAS A WIDE RANGE OF COMPUTERS, CONSOLES AND RELATED PRODUCTS ON DISPLAY.

THE LASERACTIVE WAS RUNNING SONIC CD, DISTRACTING ME MOMENTARILY. BUT ONLY BRIEFLY, HONEST.

EVENT GOERS

Readers let us know why they head to retro events

Ross
I try to attend most UK events, with Revival being my personal favourite. It's a smaller event, the crowd are familiar and it has a genuine family feel. A lot of what is on show be it console or arcade is community provided, so we all feel part of it.

Jackie Mason
We tend to go to the events to socialise and meet up with mates! If it's an event with arcades I like to play those but the others are more a get together. It's always a great day/weekend away.

Raftronaut
I go to the Midwest Gaming Classic every year so I can speak to other enthusiasts of NES homebrew. Nothing beats talking shop in person and getting feedback from players.

Rick Meves
It's become a yearly tradition for my friends and me. I love browsing the vendor floor, running across items I'll never see in a local shop. But gaming with my friends is always my favourite part of the event.

Heinz Hartz
In Germany I grew fond of the retro-gaming markets that pop up almost every month such as the RetroGamesCon. There you can find many good buys as a collector.

Mark Knight
I'd love to, but I'd rather not. I'd just prefer to play games for fun than be watched and compared to others...

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of one of our classic retro books. Good luck everyone!

THE RIGHT FIGHT

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
I was wondering if you might consider reviewing *Mazin Wars*, the 1993 Sega Mega Drive beat-'em-up? It was based on a manga that is part of a long-running Japanese franchise called *Mazinger*, and it is a futuristic brawler with similar gameplay to the *Golden Axe* series. It also has very nice graphics and character designs. To date, it has never been re-released, which I think is a shame, but I've always felt that it matches Sega's iconic series in terms of playability. It's certainly worth checking out.
Kind regards,
Vittorio Trevitt.

» [Mega Drive] If you've got a spare £100 you can grab a copy of this interesting Mega Drive brawler.

Well this is a blast from the past. Thanks for the reminder, Vittorio. Nick is our resident fighting expert so I'm sure we can put something together on it.

NEW GAME, OLD IDEA

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
There has been a really interesting emergence of developers who are making new games that have clearly been inspired by the look, feel and sound of the retro-gaming era. Richard Jordan (*Melkhior's Mansion*) and Craig Smith (*Beep's Escape*) are a couple of notable examples I can think of. Would it be possible to have a feature or two on developers like that and how they have been inspired by some of the classics we know and love.
Many thanks,
Robin Dewar

» [PC] *Melkhior's Mansion* effortlessly channels Ultimate's isometric adventures. A Making Of about it feels long overdue.

Thanks for getting in touch, Robin. You're quite right that many modern developers are inspired by the games of the past and you've picked two cracking examples. Leave it with us.

MISSING LINK

Dearest **Retro Gamer**,
I get through the mag in about a month so I've taken to trawling through eBay to get my fix! As a self-confessed golf dweeb, how about a feature on golf games? *Ninja Golf*, *MicroProse Golf*, *Links 386* and the *PGA Tour* series all seem to appeal to even non-golfers, so it would be a dream come true to see a huge feature on this popular genre!
Sincere love and respect,
James Parkinson

We'll agree that golf is a popular subject for videogames, James. We've covered the likes

» [PC] We covered the first *PGA Tour Golf* all the way back in issue 88.

STAR LETTER

THE BEST HANDHELD EVER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
It feels like a retrospective on Nintendo's DS is long overdue in the mag. I'm a huge fan of the system and feel like it was not only instrumental in taking Nintendo in a new direction, but also highlighted the incoming popularity of 'casual games' thanks to titles like *Yoshi Touch & Go*, *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training* and *Nintendogs*. I'm clearly not the only person who feels like this as it has sold over 154 million units. Handhelds never seem to get as much coverage in the gaming press like home consoles and computers do, so it would be great to see a list of the best DS games, or a look at how it was made. Please run a cover feature on this exceptional handheld, I'd buy it in a heartbeat.
James Collins

» [DS] Non-traditional gamers loved games like *Nintendogs*. No wonder the handheld shifted over 154 million units.

It's great to see your passion for Nintendo's DS, James. Darran is a big fan of the DS, as is Nick, so we're sure we can get something in place for next year's 20th anniversary. You've made us feel all warm and fuzzy inside, so a retro book will be winging its way to you.

CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

of *PGA Tour Golf* in the past, but it would be good to look at the genre in general.

HIDDEN TREASURE

Dear friends of **Retro Gamer**,
I am a big fan of your magazine, which I buy every month here in Los Angeles, California.

I am originally from Italy. My father used to be the exclusive importer of Intellivision, ColecoVision and Sega back in the Eighties. He often brought home some of the videogames he was importing and selling in the Italian market and I still have plenty of them at home back in Italy.

One thing he gave me when I was a kid were these two Intellivision cartridges (see the attached photo). He explained to me at that time that these were test cartridges he received from the main offices of Intellivision to see whether he was interested in importing them in Italy. I remember playing these games as a kid, and these two cartridges have been perfectly stored in my mom's closet since then.

I think I may still have an Intellivision system back home in Italy and I may check these cartridges the next time I am there. I am not interested in selling them but I'd love to learn more about these games, whether these cartridges are rare and how to properly keep them in good shape. Thank you so much!

Aaron Ghirardelli

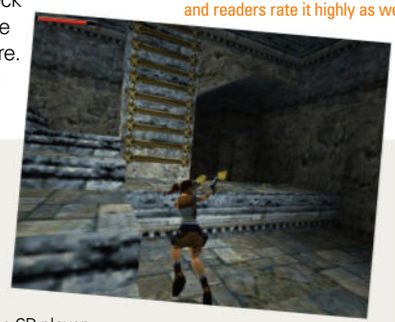
» These rarities are great to see. Who knows what else Aaron has hidden away?

Thanks for sharing Aaron, these are truly tremendous finds. We know that *Illusions* came out on the ColecoVision, but we've not personally heard of *Scarfinger* before. Hopefully some of our readers will have a better idea of their rarity and worth.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Nintendo's eShop closures

With the news that Nintendo's eShop for the 3DS and Wii U were closing down, Darran felt it was time to grab some of the titles he was still after before they were gone forever. After much deliberation he decided to grab *Chain Blaster*, Hal Laboratory's *BoxBoy!* games and the 3DS version of *Streets Of Rage*. Nick's still got a couple of days to decide on what he wants before the stores close down, while Tim and Andy won't be buying anything.



» [PC] We've always enjoyed *Tomb Raider II* and readers rate it highly as well.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What is your favourite Core Design game?

James Harvey
My mum, not a gamer in the slightest, would sit with me and solve puzzles as we played *Tomb Raider* for hours. Such great memories.

Benjamin Burns
I've always felt that *Fighting Force* is criminally underrated. Sure, it was never going to win any awards for innovation, but it was a solid action brawler that ten-year-old me played over and over. Plus, it was almost *Streets Of Rage 4*!

Ben James
Corporation on the Amiga. I found it fascinating to play as well as technically interesting. I bought and finished the expansion pack too after completing the main game.

BenyoBoy
I still have a fond memory of playing *Fighting Force* a lot, a really decent 3D beat-'em-up on the PC.

Shutan Uzuki
While not a favourite, I think *Project Eden* tried some things, and is still very enjoyable to this day (if you manage to make it run of course).

Jason
Jaguar XJ220. It may have been a *Lotus* rip-off but I absolutely loved it on my Amiga. Getting to play around with the CD player before starting a race and then designing your own courses too. Just a great all-round package.

SpectrumNez
I always enjoyed *CarVup*. Great little game that I came back to again and again. I also enjoyed *Curse Of Enchantia*, but I might be biased on that one because I playtested it during my work experience time at Core Design.

Paul Driscoll
For me I'll always love the *Chuck Rock* games. My love will be for the Amiga version, but the Mega-CD ports in particular are so well done.

Iain
Tomb Raider II, one of the first games I bought for my PlayStation. I've still got my copy to this day.

Martin Gams
I don't know why but for me it is *Firestorm: Thunderhawk 2* on the PlayStation.

Blank
Rick Dangerous 1 and *2*! Ridiculously punishing, frustrating and fun!

FlashBowski
It's got to be the original *Tomb Raider* on the PlayStation and that epic introduction to the T-rex.

retro GAMER

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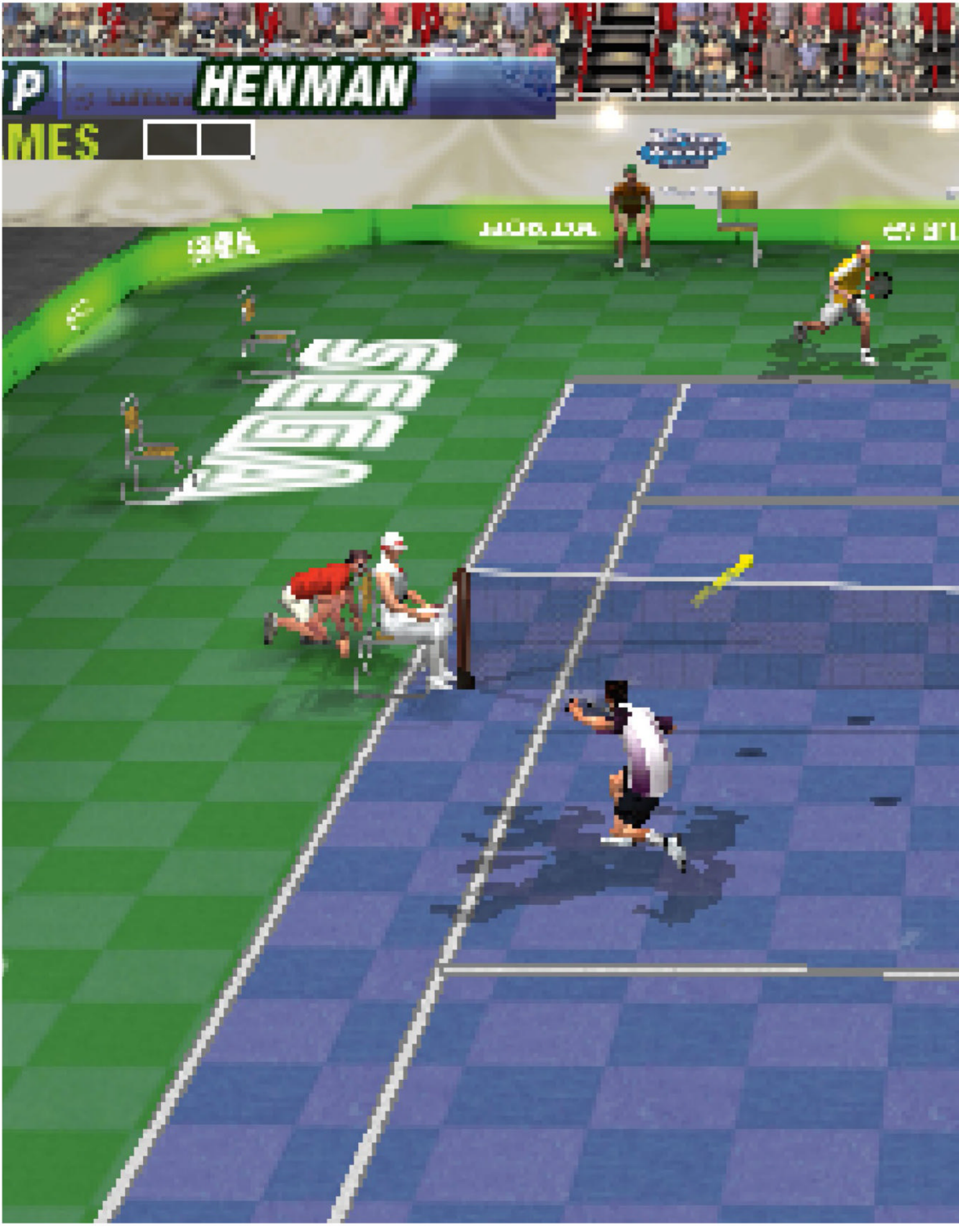
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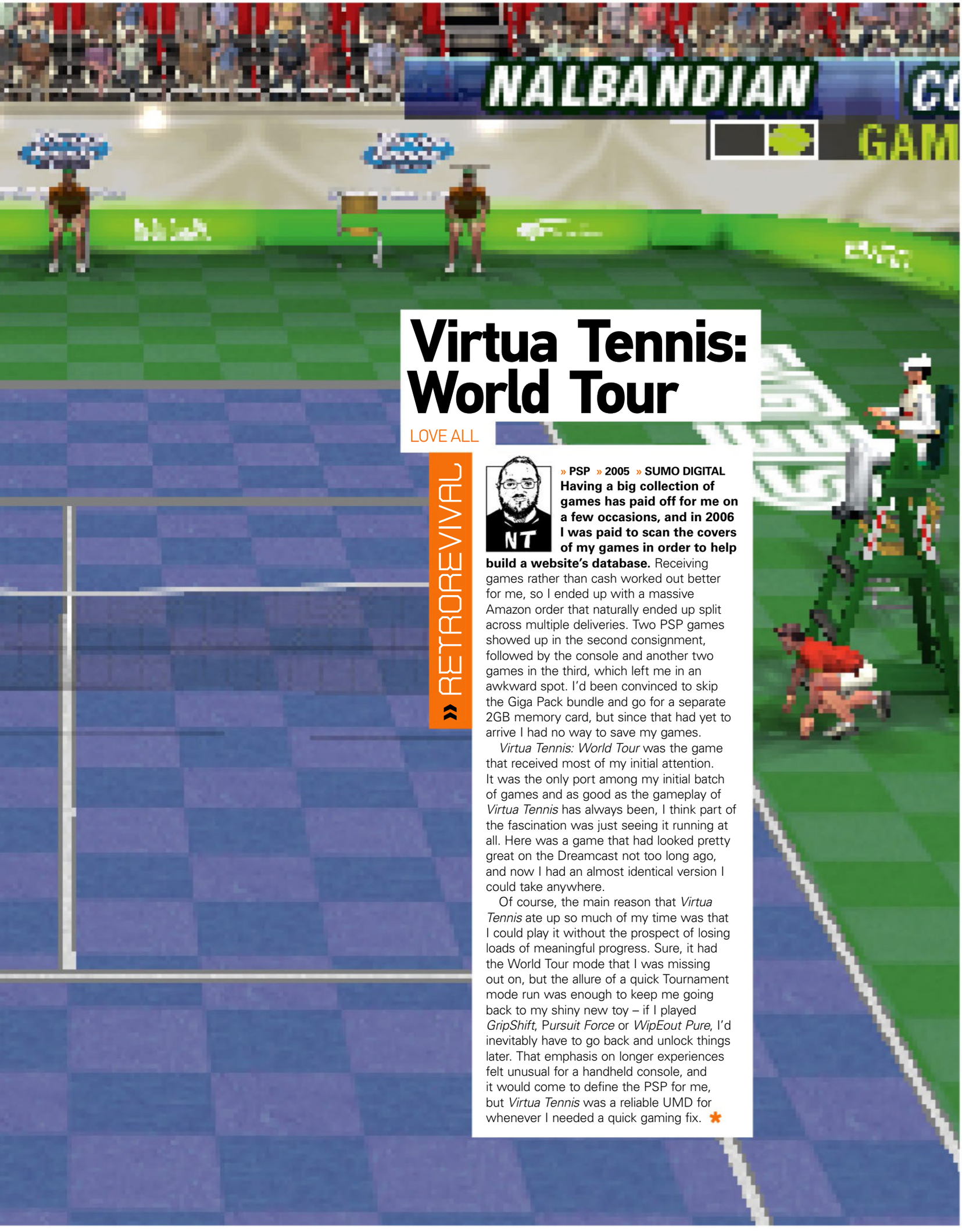


Virtua Tennis: World Tour

LOVE ALL

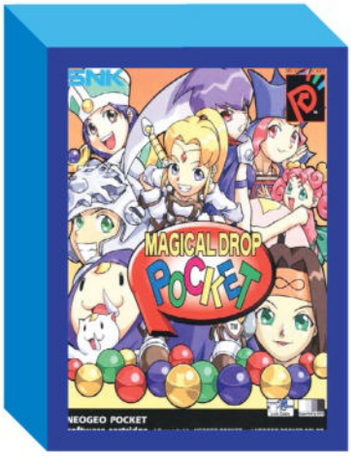
» PSP » 2005 » SUMO DIGITAL

Having a big collection of games has paid off for me on a few occasions, and in 2006 I was paid to scan the covers of my games in order to help build a website's database. Receiving games rather than cash worked out better for me, so I ended up with a massive Amazon order that naturally ended up split across multiple deliveries. Two PSP games showed up in the second consignment, followed by the console and another two games in the third, which left me in an awkward spot. I'd been convinced to skip the Giga Pack bundle and go for a separate 2GB memory card, but since that had yet to arrive I had no way to save my games.

Virtua Tennis: World Tour was the game that received most of my initial attention. It was the only port among my initial batch of games and as good as the gameplay of *Virtua Tennis* has always been, I think part of the fascination was just seeing it running at all. Here was a game that had looked pretty great on the Dreamcast not too long ago, and now I had an almost identical version I could take anywhere.

Of course, the main reason that *Virtua Tennis* ate up so much of my time was that I could play it without the prospect of losing loads of meaningful progress. Sure, it had the World Tour mode that I was missing out on, but the allure of a quick Tournament mode run was enough to keep me going back to my shiny new toy – if I played *GripShift*, *Pursuit Force* or *WipEout Pure*, I'd inevitably have to go back and unlock things later. That emphasis on longer experiences felt unusual for a handheld console, and it would come to define the PSP for me, but *Virtua Tennis* was a reliable UMD for whenever I needed a quick gaming fix.

ENDGAME



MAGICAL DROP POCKET

» You know how this story goes – there's a tournament involving matching coloured objects, and the winner's wish will be granted. As usual, Nick wasn't invited due to the ongoing puzzle game community conspiracy against him, so the Hierophant has emerged victorious this time. Let's take a look at how he used his singular wish then, shall we?

01

» The Hierophant decides to wish everybody happy and peaceful lives. "A bank balance that would make Bernard Arnault blush," was Nick's wish, so we're glad someone with admirable goals won.

02

» Societal change doesn't happen overnight, so our victor has to wait a few days to see the results of his actions. The same would be true if Nick won – giant Sonic statues take time to build too.

03

» The thing with wishes is that they're often tricky things, and that's true here. Everyone in town now appears to resemble the Fool, the game's weakest character and a nonsense-babbling halfwit.

04

» Of course, this still counts as a success because ignorance is bliss. The Hierophant has managed to reduce the world's collective intelligence more than television and social media combined, but the people are genuinely happy and untroubled.

05

» And that's your lot. You matched the colours and created a world of idiots, thanks for playing, see you next time. Maybe Nick should have been allowed to enter – since he had no noble intentions, it would have been funnier to see his wish undermined.

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